



1 機巧少女は  
Facing "Cannibal Candy"  
傷つかな  
Unbreakable Machine-Doll

海冬レイジ るるこお Illustration



"IT'S HARD FOR  
YOU TO FIGHT  
WEARING THEM,  
AND THERE IS  
ALWAYS THE RISK  
OF THE STRAP  
BREAKING. SO USE  
THESE FOR THE  
TIME BEING."





*SHE WAS LIKE A  
SWIFT GALE.  
WITH ONE BOUND,  
SHE CLOSED IN ON  
THE ENEMY  
AUTOMATON AND  
ATTACKED.*







Shoko  
Karyusai  
花柳斎硝子

SAY,  
BOY.  
BECOME  
MINE.



Charlotte Belew  
シャルロット・ブリュー

ARE  
YOU  
AN  
IDIOT?  
-OR  
DO  
YOU  
HAVE  
SOME  
SORT  
OF  
DEATH  
WISH?

Sigmund  
シグムント

I'M  
NOT  
A  
BIRD,  
CHARL.

KNOW  
YOUR  
PLACE,  
SAMURAI  
BOY.

Kimberley  
キンバリー



IF  
RAISHIN  
DESIRES  
FOR IT,  
I'LL GO  
TO THE  
ENDS OF  
THE  
EARTH.

LET'S  
GO,  
YAYA.

Raishin  
Akabane  
赤羽雷真

Yaya  
夜々



**Kikou Shoujo wa Kizutsukanai:**

Volume 1

***Facing Cannibal Candy***

Written by : Reiji Kaitou

Illustration by : Ruroo

*English Translation by NanoDesu Translations*



**DISCLAIMER:** The work translated here is the legal property of its original copyright holder. It is translated here without monetary incentive solely for the purposes of promoting domestic interest in the work and improving personal language proficiency. Should the work be lincensed for English translation or upon request by the original copyright holders, please stop distribution of this document at once.

Please send any and all comments to [NanoDesuTranslations@gmail.com](mailto:NanoDesuTranslations@gmail.com)



# Unbreakable Machine-Doll

## contents

Prologue 極東の人形使い#1 .....p11

Chapter 1 竜を狩る者 .....p24

Chapter 2 遭遇戦は一瞬で .....p58

Chapter 3 混沌に誘う、甘言 .....p88

Chapter 4 虚構の晚餐 .....p120

Chapter 5 つまり、始めの、始めから .....p156

Chapter 6 本性 .....p189

Chapter 7 永久に飢える獣 .....p218

Epilogue 極東の人形使い#2 .....p253





Contents

1. Chapter 1.....	1
2. Chapter 2.....	48
3. Chapter 3.....	79
4. Chapter 4.....	112
5. Chapter 5.....	151
6. Chapter 6.....	183
7. Chapter 7.....	213
8. Epilogue.....	249
9. Afterwords.....	256
10. Translation Credits.....	260



## Prologue

### The Puppeteer from the Far East

“Yaya is cute, Yaya is super cute. Yaya is the cutest in the world.”

The girl was clasping her hands together, muttering softly like she was deep in prayer.

The gentle sunlight drifted down, with the rhythmic sound of steam hissing in the background. The train had departed from London, and was now Liverpool-bound. In one of the 2<sup>nd</sup> class passenger carriages, a scene was unfolding between an odd pair.

The two were Orientals, a youth and a girl.

Their oddity did not extend to their appearance alone. Inexplicably, the girl was leaning over the seat opposite her, as though trying to cover the youth with her body, while whispering strange words to him.

“Yaya is so cute I love Yaya Yaya is so bewitching Yaya is my wife—“

Abruptly, the whispering stopped.

With one eye open, the youth was shooting a sharp glare in her direction.

“... Were you awake, Raishin?”

“What were you doing so close to my ear?”

“Yaya was reciting a charm to make Raishin fall in love with me.”

“Was it really something so cute and innocent? Because it sure felt like you were trying to corrupt me somehow, you know?”

Completely ignoring his retort, the girl calmly pointed out of the window.

“Look, Raishin. We’re already inside Machine City.”







## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“Ahh, about time we arrived. Travelling half a day from London’s no joke. My butt’s sore from all that sitting.”

“That means the top school in all of Western Europe should be coming into view shortly.”

Grinning happily, the girl pressed herself up against the youth.

“This school houses its students in dormitories right?”

“Yeah.”

“So when night comes, it’ll be just the two of us to ourselves right?”

“I’d think so...”

“I’m looking forward to many sleepless nights then <3”

“Actually, I’ll be sleeping. If you try anything funny though, I’ll kick you out of the room.”

“...—?!”

“What’s with that look of betrayal on your face? I’ll say it again; we’re not here on a vacation.”

The girl’s face clouded over, heartbreak etched deep in her trembling black pupils.

“This city is, after all, where the Wiseman’s Night Party will begin.”

The expression on the girl’s face immediately tightened.

“Magi competing against one another for supremacy, the winner decided through a blood soaked banquet of battles.

“Yeah. I’ll be counting on you then, Yaya.”

“Of course. If it’s for Raishin, I’d be willing to go through anything; through fire, into your futon,”



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“Don’t sneak into my futon.”

“Ah, is this what they call an interest in outdoor fuc...”

“What was that? Did something so vulgar just come out of your innocent looking face?”

“If that is what Rashin desires, then Yaya will serve with all her heart. Whether it’s in the bushes, or even if it’s in front of everyone.”

“As much as I’d like to thank you for your devotion, I can’t... because you’ve completely misinterpreted something. I don’t want THAT kind of service; rather, what I’m expecting from you is something altogether different.”

In that vein, the two of them carried on their playful banter as the scenery of the modern town flashed by them outside the window.

Concrete buildings lined the main street, while T-Fords imported from America trundled along the paved roads. The street corners were littered with stands selling coffee, run by machine dolls. The dolls’ body were made of tin, and their stiff, awkward movements were somehow amusing to watch.

Machine City Liverpool.

The point base from which the vast amount of cotton produced by the city of Manchester was exported to the rest of the world. The British Empire proudly boasted that it was one of, if not the best, port cities in the world. Recently however, it was also becoming famous for being the next great city of academics, after Cambridge.

Finally, the train pulled into the station, which had a beautiful iron dome as the highlight of its modern design.

And passed on through, without even a hint of slowing down.

“Why didn’t it stop?” “This was supposed to be the terminal station!”

The passengers were stirring, doubt and dissatisfaction lining their voices.

The train conductor burst through a door, a dire look on his face.



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“Everyone, please, please calm down and listen carefully to me.”  
Having asked for such, it was obvious that he himself was anything but calm.  
In a trembling voice, he continued on.

“The brakes are not working!”

There was a silence so quiet you could hear a drop of water.

And then almost immediately, the entire carriage descended into a panicked frenzy.

“Everyone calm down! It’ll be fine, the train will eventually come to a halt on its own!”

However, the conductor’s voice did not register with anyone. It was lost amid the screaming and roaring of the passengers.

In the first place, the train did not look remotely close to slowing down at all. This was probably because it was on a slope.

It was simple physics. Anything on a downward slope would never naturally come to a stop.

Like an omen of the catastrophe to come, the train literally began to shudder. At that moment—

“Everybody, return to your seats!”

All the passengers simultaneously turned to gaze at the speaker.

The voice belonged to the person who had been bantering with the girl earlier, the Oriental youth.

He was of small build and had a slender figure. His eyes were sharp like an eagle’s.

The young girl standing next to him was clad in a kimono. The kimono was short, and the fluttering of the cloth allowed one to catch an occasional glimpse of her thighs. Her bare shoulders showed off her lustrous skin, which was white as snow. Her face did not have any outstanding parts, so at first



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

glance she looked plain and simple, but in reality, her exceedingly well-ordered features was like a delicate work of art belonging to a museum. Her waist length hair shone with a brilliance that made it look like it was perpetually wet. Her skin was tender and soft like a white peach. She was shorter than the youth by a head, making her look like a literal doll.

They weren't ordinary people. Overwhelmed by their presence, the passengers quietly returned to their seats.

"Conductor, please inform the rest of the carriages as well. Those who do not wish to die should hold on tightly to their seats."

It wasn't a request, it was an order. The conductor gave the briefest of nods, before dashing off into the next carriage.

The youth watched him disappear, before making his way through the carriage. As he did so, his eyes came to rest on a seat next to him.

A young girl was hugging her little sister, the latter curled up into a ball.

There was fear reflected in her eyes. Her small frame made her resemble a frightened little squirrel.

The youth flashed a clumsy smile at her, before placing his hand on her head.

"Don't worry. I'll take care of everything."

The youth took off his coat then nimbly exited through a window, making his way to the top of the carriage. The kimono clad girl followed shortly after him.

Moving with the grace of acrobats, the pair swiftly ran to the front of the train.

"Raishin, look at that!"

"That's... a pretty sharp bend."

The line running through downtown had a particularly harsh curve. If the train were to mount it, it would surely derail!



“We have to stop it before it reaches the curve. In that case...Yaya, Shinkan Shijuuhachishou<sup>1</sup>.”

“Got it!”

Using the nose of the train as a base, the girl kicked off it, propelling herself forward. The backlash was tremendous, causing the train to decelerate sharply.

The girl sped through the air like a bullet, landing a considerable distance in front of the train. However, the train had not stopped. The train was rapidly charging straight towards her, about to run her over!

The people below on the streets noticed the abnormal scene unfolding and started screaming.

The youth however, remained unfazed. Bracing himself against the spout of the engine locomotive, he prepared some kind of attack.

On doing so, the girl opened her palm towards him. In a flash, something akin to a bluish-white flame gushed forth, forming something like a chain that linked the girl and the youth together.

The girl was now right in front of the train. A few hundred tonnes of train was now bearing down on her—

And then, a crash.

It was an attack so strong the front of the train was dented in. The inertia of the carriages behind the front car carried them forward, causing them to collide into each other in succession. Some of the carriages were even forced upwards. The girl had driven her geta<sup>2</sup> firmly into the ground, breaking the railroad tie and causing it to be lodged deep into the earth. A great amount of train ballast had been blown up into the air, and the girl herself had been driven back fifty metres or so.

However, the girl was unharmed.

---

<sup>1</sup>森閑四八衝 (Silent Forest: 48<sup>th</sup> Point)

<sup>2</sup> Japanese sandals.



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

Demonstrating her body's extreme sturdiness, she had completely stopped the runaway train dead in its tracks. As for the rest of the carriages, there were some which were slanted in different directions, some had their shafts broken, others had derailed... although, having said that much, none of the carriages had flipped over completely. While it was impossible that the injury rate would be zero, at the very least the number of casualties had been minimized.

After confirming the train had come to a complete halt, the youth leapt down onto the tracks.

"Well done Yaya. You sure as hell didn't hold back anything, did you?"

The girl was delighted from the praise. She stuck her head out expectantly, fidgeting while waiting for him to pet her head. However, the youth abruptly turned on his heels.

Just like that, he started walking back. Having no choice, the girl chased after him.

When they returned to their carriage, a scene of carnage lay before them. Luggage was strewn about all over the place, and the moans and groans of the injured could be heard. Still, there were no serious casualties. Giving them a quick, unsympathetic glance, he began to search for his own trunk.

"—Excuse me!"

Just as he found his trunk, a voice called out to him from behind.

It was the sisters from earlier. The elder sister was looking at the youth with a shy expression on her face. The younger sister timidly approached the youth with a slight smile on her face, holding out his coat.

The youth took it, and turning to face the elder sister, curtly asked her.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. Um, are you... a mage?"

"No. I'm a Puppeteer."



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“So, that girl over there, she’s an automaton...?”

Her eyes widening, she stared at the girl next to her, a little unnerved.

Her shock was understandable. Blood flowed under the girl’s skin, which had a slight tinge of red to it. She had a heartbeat, and she was breathing as well. No matter how you looked at it, she was totally human.

This high level of detail in an automaton, while not unheard of in this place known as Machine City, was something that could hardly be called a common sight. For most of the residents here, the automata they were familiar with were mainly cheap tin constructs which had exposed gears and cylinders.

The female form automaton, much like a real girl would, gave a gentle smile.

“Yes, Yaya is Raishin’s “personal doll”. —Even in bed”

That last part was an unnecessary remark.

The passengers started whispering amongst themselves. The elder sister started blushing deeply while staring at them.

“Noooooooooooo you pervert!”

Whoosh, went her open palm through the air, as she slapped the youth on the cheek.

Hugging her little sister, she ran away as fast as she could.

“Yaya...”

“Yes, Raishin?”

“Right now, there’s this dark feeling swirling about in my heart. I wonder what it is.”

“... Lust?”

“It’s anger! Why do you always keep saying things that will cause other people to get the wrong idea!?”



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“But...! That girl was looking at Raishin with a lewd look in her eyes...!”

“You’re the one who’s looking at other people the wrong way!”

After being scolded, the girl dropped the hem of her kimono and looked down at her feet despondently.

Her thin eyebrows pointed downwards, while tears began to form at the corners of her eyes.

Her sad figure was painful to watch. The youth let out a sigh.

“Forget it. Let’s go. If the police get here it’ll be a hassle to deal with them.”

“... Ok!”

Slinging his trunk over his shoulder, he started walking off. The clip-clop of the geta echoed as the girl followed closely behind him.

Stepping off the carriage, the passengers could only watch dumfounded as they disappeared into the throng of people in the city.

Machine civilization only started to blossom at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alongside the remarkable development in science and technology, mankind was able to establish advanced magic as a system.

Machinart. An innovation which completely turned the world of magic upside down.

It involved running a magic circuit through an automaton, and having a puppeteer control it. This combination allowed the casting of magic that were faster, more detailed, and stronger than traditional methods.

With the advent of this technique, magi were able to compress complex magic circles and long incantations into automata, effectively being able to cast magic instantly.



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

At the same time however, this technique was also being exploited for military use.

The victory at Trafalgar, as well as the triumph at Waterloo...neither of these would have been possible if not for the existence of the pride of British army, the Machinart Division

Of course, this wasn't restricted to just England. In this era, countries stockpiled automata in an escalating arms race, as well as continuing to develop new, talented puppeteers to control them. The major powers of the world were in a frenzied state trying to outdo each other.

It was only a matter of time then, before the field of education became something of national importance.

A few hours after the incident with the train, at the heart of the city of Liverpool.

A curious couple stopped before a massive gate.

An Oriental youth and an automaton girl. It was the pair who had stopped the runaway train earlier.

"The Royal Academy of Machinart, Walpurgis."

The youth read out the words engraved onto the plate, with a cynical smile on his face.

"Famous for being the highest institute of education within the realm of magic. It looks more like a fort, no, maybe a prison would be a better comparison."

The scenery he was describing expanded before his eyes as he walked on.

Towering over the front was a large, majestic lecture hall which brought Buckingham Palace to mind when one looked at it. Its brick walls were easily 50 metres tall, and its stone-wrought gate had little eyeholes set in them. The holes didn't seem like they were made to repel incoming enemies, they felt



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

more like they were there to shoot down any fleeing students. As further proof, the gatekeeper wasn't monitoring activity from the town, but rather, keeping an eye on the premises.

Even the most conservative of people would have to admit the whole thing was pretty overbearing. The school was as frightening as a military base.

However, unbothered by it all, the automaton girl pointed towards the dormitories.

"Look over there Raishin. That's our new love nest. <3"

She was in high spirits.

In contrast, the youth was unnaturally silent. Noticing this, she tilted her head at him.

"What's wrong, Raishin? You look depressed."

"Once we pass through that gate, you know you won't be able to return to the world for a quite a while right?"

Testing her resolve, the youth stared straight into the eyes of the girl.

"It's the law of this country. All automata belonging to the students of the Academy cannot step foot into town until after graduation."

Her hand on her chest, the girl spoke without hesitation, like she was reciting a pledge.

"The only place Yaya desires to be is where Raishin is. Whether it's on the battlefield, or in prison, that will never change."

"You think too highly of me. I'm merely using you as a tool for revenge."

"Don't be so hard on yourself Raishin. Yaya was a mere doll created by Shouko, from the day I was born I was but a mere tool. And then once this tool was given a purpose, she started living for the first time in her life."

Her gentle smile was as beautiful as the blooming of a flower.



## Prologue – The Puppeteer from the Far East

---

“I’ll always be by your side Rashin. Even when you’re in your futon.”

“I’ll have to decline that. However, keep up that strong resolve of yours.”

The youth relaxed his face, and strode forwards with firm steps.

On that day, the solitary youth, alongside his matchless automaton, passed through the gates into the academy.

With that, what awaited him was that banquet of strife—



### **Chapter 1**

### **One Who Hunts Dragons**

#### **Part 1**

A single paved road ran through the academy grounds in a north-south direction.

This road was known as the main street. It was the artery of the academy which connected the various lecture-halls and auditoriums, the eight dormitory buildings, as well as the dining hall together. During lunch break, students could be seen crowding the road.

It was a clear and sunny Monday. As expected, the streets were crowded with students during today's lunch break as well.

Rather abruptly, the bustle subsided.

A wave of nervous fear spread through the crowd, the students turning around one after another to look at the source.

Behind them, a lone girl was approaching, her beautiful golden hair fluttering behind her.

She had graceful features, and her body was well-proportioned. She was such a beautiful girl that you could almost see the air around her sparkle, but she had a sour look on her face, which ruined her elfish beauty. A hostile aura was emanating from her, like she was some sort of ferocious beast.

A small dragon, no bigger than a cat, was resting on top of the hat she was wearing.

It couldn't be called anything other than a dragon. Its head resembled a cross between a lizard and a crocodile, but the expression on its face was more noble and refined. There were two horns growing on its forehead, and its body structure resembled that of a feline. It had four wings across its back, so rather than saying they resembled a bird's wings it would be better to say they were similar to a butterfly's. Its whole body was covered in steel-coloured scales.



“It’s like Moses parting the Red Sea.”

The dragon on her hat spoke. It had a surprisingly low voice for its size.

Like the dragon had said, a path in front of the girl was opening up, the sea of people in front of her rapidly and neatly splitting into two.

“Everyone’s scared of you.”

“Hmph. That’s what usually happens.”

“Casually stating this as ‘usual’, that’s the problem right there. Even you were Cannibal Candy’s true identity, the level of fear you inspire wouldn’t be as great as the level you do now.”

At that moment, a male student fell over in front of her, having seemingly stumbled over something.

Noticing the girl, he began to shake violently.

“Aaa, ah I’m sorry! Don’t kill me, please!”

“... Scram.”

“Yesssssss!”

He scrambled away in a hurry. His fleeing visage was much like that of someone who had run into a bear. The girl pouted.

“You’re right, it does seem a little unreasonable. How can people be that scared of me?”

“Because you ARE that scary. You’re the girl who, having barely stepped foot into the academy, sent five seniors to the hospital.”

“I was just punishing them for their insolence. They might have been trying to invite me to join their club or whatever, but since they were a little too touchy-feely for my liking, I felt my body was in danger, and so...”



“Then there was that time when you shoved your room mate out the window.”

“That was *force majeure*<sup>1</sup>. That girl tried to sneak into the bathroom and because that irked me— I mean, to protect a maiden’s secrets, I had to do it.”

“Would you also call the destruction of the anatomy laboratory room because you didn’t want to touch a frog *force majeure* as well? The professor cried over losing so many valuable specimens, you know.”

“...”

“And how about that time where you panicked because of a wasp, and ended up setting fire to the whole garden?”

“Quiet, Sigmund. If you don’t shut up now, I’ll change your chicken to chickpeas.”

“I’m not a bird, Charl. Chickpeas alone will not sustain my body.”

The blonde girl— Charl made no effort to hide her irritation as she strode on with large steps.

However, the dragon didn’t give up, and continued on.

“How about making some friends? I think the reaction from people around you would change as well.”

“Everyone here in the academy is an enemy. They’re all obstacles in the way of the Wiseman’s throne. I have no intention of becoming familiar with anyone of them.”

“That sort of attitude will cause you to remain alone. You’ll never get a boyfriend at this rate. Are you fine with being unpopular for the rest of your life?”

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force\\_majeure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force_majeure)



“Who’re you calling unpopular? There’s no way all the men in the world can resist such a cute girl like me. Even now they approach me in droves, much like common houseflies swarming over a rafflesia flower.”

“While a rafflesia is a perfect name for you— someone who people hold their noses and flee from—I have serious doubts over boys flocking to you. Doing whatever you feel like doing, there’s no way a stubborn donkey like you could ever— Oh, I stand corrected. It looks like you have drawn in a fly after all. Although it looks like he has someone tagging along with him already.”

Raising a forelimb, the dragon pointed ahead. Charl looked over, and standing right in the middle of the opened path was a strange pair.

One of them was a youth. He was wearing what looked like a military issue harness on top of his uniform, which was worn out of shape. The harness seemed to act as a replacement for a holster, being packed full of magic tools like magic stones and amulets, as well as a knife and a torchlight. He had a sharp glint in his eye, and his body was sharp and angular.

The other was a girl. She wasn’t wearing a school uniform. Instead, she was wearing a splendid outfit, probably a kimono. She had seen it before in one of those weird paintings, called an Ukiyoe<sup>2</sup> or something. She was short and had a small face, like she was a doll— no, Charl was ninety-nine percent sure she was an automaton.

In any case, both had faces which she had never seen before.

While her eye was turned by the intricate craftsmanship of the automaton, the youth had brazenly spoken.

“Lady Charlotte Belew, I presume.”

He spoke his lines like he was acting in a play, and had an arrogant smile on his face. To label him a handsome person outright... would be difficult, but from his overall looks, there was no denying he had an oriental charm to him.

“Sophomore year in the academy, a member of the Rounds, who comprise the top thirteen people in the Night Party. London bookmakers have you at

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ukiyo-e.se/>



three-to-one on winning it, which means you're one of the leading candidates for the Wiseman's throne."

He smoothly recited Charl's profile.

"Registration Code **Tyrant Rex**. I guess you really are like a fearsome dragon."

He finished in a mocking voice. However the look in his eyes was sharp in contrast, staring at Charl's hand— or more precisely, his gaze was fixed on her glove. Made of silk, it shimmered under the light; the words [Tyrant Rex] had been woven into the pearl-white glove with gold thread. This glove was special, only participants in the Night Party were issued one.

Just who is this rude, ill-mannered boy?

Charl frowned petulantly, staring at the youth.

"Since you know that much, what are you planning? What do you want with me?"

"Hand over your entry qualification."

She was dumbfounded by this statement. For a brief moment, she couldn't comprehend what he had just said.

"... Are you challenging me to a battle?"

"No. Consider this more of an advance notice."

Charl sighed deeply.

"Are you an idiot? Or perhaps— you must really want to die."

She radiated a killing aura, cold as ice.

Instilling fear in the surrounding people, the students hurriedly retreated from the scene.

Thus, rather abruptly, the lunch break on campus turned into a battleground.



### Part 2

Two days prior.

It was evening, and in the dim hallway of the central auditorium, Raishin was trembling all over.

“Out of one thousand, two hundred and thirty six people, I placed one thousand, two hundred and thirty fifth...?”

Inside his clenched fist, was his so called test result.

Upon entering the academy, he had been rushed off to do a special test to gauge his academic ability. The examiner’s response to him had been chilly ever since the middle of the test, but seeing his ability reduced to simple numbers made it hard to bear.

“Please don’t feel so down.”

Yaya was consoling him with a gentle smile on her face.

“Yaya knows all about the hellish training that Raishin has gone through. Leaving aside written and oral examinations, there’s no way Raishin will lose in actual battle. Am I not right?”

However, Raishin became all the more depressed, hanging his head even further.

“... Sorry, Yaya.”

“Why are you apologising?”

“Here you are, one of the top class automata of the Karyuusai brand, easily worth as much as a battleship. And yet for your handler’s grades to be such a failure, I’m such a pathetic—“

“Don’t say that! All Yaya needs is to be together with Raishin...”

“How can I show my face to Shouko!?”



There was a weird sound as Yaya stiffened suddenly.

“Huh, Yaya? Why is do you seem upset — wait, hold on, at least tell me why!”

“Shouko, Shouko, Shouko... it’s always nothing but Shouko...!”

Yaya was half in tears as she throttled Raishin by his neck.

“At least now you know your place, Samurai Boy.”

Suddenly, a voice cut in from the side. Surprised, Yaya released her hold on Raishin, causing him to fall down.

Coughing violently, Raishin looked up to see a tall, beautiful woman standing in front of him.

Her red hair was swept up, and intelligence could be seen inside her blue eyes. She was wearing the uniform of the educational staff, and a pair of glasses had been hung from her chest.

Her cold beauty was familiar to him. She had been the test officer in charge of Raishin.

“I’m Professor Kimberly, in charge of Machine Physics. Unfortunately for the both of us, you’ve been assigned to me.”

“Where are my manners? It’s nice to meet you. I’m in your care then, Professor Kimberly.”

Raishin did his greeting quickly. Yaya, flustered, bowed in greeting as well.

Kimberly continued on without even giving a smile.

“I congratulate you on making the long trip from a tiny backwater village in the Far East, but your grades are the harsh reality. If you wish to graduate, I suggest getting those credits, even if it kills you. I especially recommend my lectures. You can get 6 credits in a normal year. Of course, that’s assuming an Oriental like you can even understand my lectures in the first place.”



“Isn’t that a little racist?”

“I’m a philanthropist. Whites, Blacks, Indians, Jews— they all equally bore me. The only measure of a man is in his knowledge. I hate idiots, and that’s all there is.”

“I find it hard to believe you can actually call yourself a philanthropist with a straight face.”

“You’ll be staying in the Tortoise dormitory. It’s the place where all the students who can’t keep up with their classes go to, the worst of the worst. Swing by whenever you’re free, and secure a room for yourself — that’s all I wanted to say.”

“Wait a minute, Professor Kimberly. It might be a little soon, but there’s something I want to consult you on.”

“Shoot.”

“How do I get into the Night Party?”

Kimberly was already walking away, but at his question she unconsciously stopped.

“There’s no way you don’t know this, right? The only ones who qualify to enter the Night Party are those with the best grades, and even from amongst them, only the top hundred qualify. As you are now, you’re on the opposite end of the spectrum; so it’s useless to even talk about it.”

“Plus the Night Party is about to commence shortly, so there’s only one round of entry tests left— I guess it’s really hopeless then?”

Raishin gave a self-deprecating laugh as he mocked himself.

Kimberly gave a glance over in his direction.

“ ... The Night Party isn’t some kind of elegant ball dance. It’s a place where Machinart clash, until there is only one person left standing. If you go at it with a half-assed attitude your life will be easily forfeit.”



“So all I have to do is be the last one standing, right?”

Kimberly looked surprised. Her eyes narrowing into slits, she looked at Raishin from head to toe like she was appraising his value.

“Why are you so fixated on the Night Party? Is graduating from here and getting the prestige this academy confers, leaving you ahead of others in life, not more than enough?”

“I made up my mind long ago. Since my goal was to become the Wiseman.”

“What do you desire? Riches? Fame? Knowledge? Power?”

“That question has no meaning. If you become the Wiseman, you’ll obtain all of the above.”

“That’s true. Being the Wiseman means that you’re not bounded by the International Charter on Magic Arts and the code of ethics that all mages must follow— in short, ‘nothing’s off limits’. You could read prohibited books, use forbidden arts, or even perform research on immortality or genetic modification. You would receive a reception on par with a general in any military army of any country in the world.”

“Heh, that was a rather lively talk.”

“... Your objective isn’t riches. It doesn’t look like you’re after fame either. You don’t seem smart enough to be seeking knowledge and wisdom. So, what then, are you after?”

Raishin didn’t answer. He just stared back at Kimberly, his eyes never wavering for even a second.

The silence grew unbearable. After a while,

“... Let me tell you the general consensus. The sole aim of the Night Party is to select the premier puppeteer of his generation. Truly, we live in such a thoroughly meritocratic world. Therefore, in the unlikely event that someone who has an entry qualification was to, say, be defeated in Machinart battle against someone who doesn’t have one—”



Like she was hinting at some sort of secret, Kimberly continued on in a low voice.

“I think there’s a need for the Night Party Executive Committee to change the way it selects its participants, don’t you?”

“... Thank you for your instruction.”

“Work hard. I look forward to see splendid results, Mr Second Last.”

Traces of a grin left on her face, Kimberly turned and vanished down the hallway.

“... For some reason, I think she’s a little scary.”

Yaya timidly offered her impression of the professor.

“Yeah... but I don’t think she’s a bad person.”

Although she had called Raishin an idiot, she hadn’t shot him down completely without listening to him speak. Concerning entry into the Night Party, she could have just told him that there was absolutely no way to enter; there was no need to discuss hypotheticals with him.

“On the contrary, I think she might be a fine woman.”

“Raishin... so you really do prefer older women...!”

Ignoring the now sobbing Yaya, he reflected over Kimberly’s words in his head.

He was second last. In order to place within the top hundred, he would have to surpass over a thousand people, the cream of the crop who were gathered from all over the world—or he would have to eliminate them.

(This probably isn’t something worth bragging about, but my knowledge is roughly on the same level as a novice, in terms of both puppetry and magic arts.)

The possibility of him using his grades to rally into contention was zero.

In that case...

Worrying about Raishin, who had sunk into silence, Yaya drew her face closer to his.

“Shall we discuss this with Shouko?”

“I’m not going to turn to the military for advice. There’s only one option for us anyway.”

Raishin laughed wryly. Even for him, it was a rather amusing way of doing things.

“We’ll have to take part in the Night Party. That’s the quickest way to killing him.”

“But how— have you thought of something?”

“Professor Kimberly said it. If I want an entry qualification, I have to become like Momotaro<sup>1</sup>.”

“Are you going exchange millet dumplings with someone?<sup>2</sup>”

He shook his head. Pursing his lips tightly, Raishin announced his plan.

“I’m going to rob a bunch of demons.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Momotaro is a Japanese folk tale. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momotar%C5%8D>

<sup>2</sup> <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/folk/momotaro/momotaro03.html>



### Part 3

“Hey, you gotta see this! A foreign student challenged the T-Rex to a fight!”

“What!? Where’s he from? What kind of idiots do they raise there?”

“Japan. He’s an idiot from Japan.”

“Japan? Is it the Izanagi style’s princess?”

“No, he’s a new guy that just arrived here two days ago.”

“What’s a new guy doing with the T-Rex? Is she spoiling for a fight?”

“No, it seems the one who started it was the new guy. Apparently he wants her entry qualification.”

“And of all the people to challenge, he chose the T-Rex... is he suicidal or something?”

“I don’t think so. Look at him, he looks confident.”

“He’s that strong? What rank is he?”

Naturally, the students’ attention became focused on him.

Raishin was feeling uneasy on the inside, but he wore a relaxed look on his face. He was ignoring the looks that others were giving him, which were a mix of oddness, contempt and even unhappiness.

“They always increase in number whenever spring rolls around.”

Charl spat out those words as the dragon perched itself on her arm.

“The number of idiots who don’t know their place, that is.”

“I may be an idiot, but at least I know my place.”

“Oh, really? What do you think it is then?”

“The 1235<sup>th</sup> place.”

Laughter broke out from all around him. An embarrassed-looking Yaya stared at the offenders, but Raishin’s face was still relaxed, not responding to the laughter.

On the other hand, Charl was dumbstruck. With her mouth agape,

“I’m shocked. You’re a real idiot. The idiot of idiots. An idiot that towers over all other idiots. Your idiocy shines like a beacon. You said you were placed 1235<sup>th</sup>? How can you hope to win against me with a grade like that...”

She stopped.

Raishin’s expression was as calm as ever in the face of her derision.

“Go ahead and laugh. Quite honestly, my puppetry skills are third-rate at best. If you compared me to the crowd surrounding us, I’m sure you’ll find that I possess less knowledge and less talent. However, there is one thing that sets me apart from them.”

“... And that is?”

“I haven’t given up before I’ve started.”

The laughter died.

Charl looked around, and everyone was averting their eyes with a sour taste in their mouths.

He was right— Most of them couldn’t participate in the Night Party.

And yet, all they did was silently watch on.

All these losers who admitted defeat before a battle, that is.

“...Hmph, I’ll at least praise your admirable determination. Or perhaps, are you just very slow on the uptake?”



“You must be joking. I’m very delicate when it comes to picking up on feelings.”

“You really are slow then. A dullard. I bet you’re the slow and easily tired type.”

“Do you even understand the meaning of what you’ve just said?! A lady of your age shouldn’t be saying something so thoughtless!”

“That’s right! If anything, Raishin is a quick finisher!”

“You be quiet! How the hell could you even know something like that anyway!?”

Raishin hurriedly silenced Yaya. However it was too late, as Charl had conspicuously brought her eyebrows together in a frown.

“Not only are you an idiot, but you’re a pervert that fools around with his doll? You’re the worst kind of deviant, you lewd freak!”

The coldness in her eyes bordered on absolute zero as she gave him a look of disgust. It was as if she was staring at a cockroach.

Raishin felt an immense depression coming on. All he wanted to do was to curl up in the corner of a dark room and hug his knees. Unfortunately, he wasn’t in any position to do so at the moment.

“I don’t go easy on perverts. Let’s smash him with all our might, Sigmund.”

“Agreed.”

In that instant, the dragon (who appeared to be named Sigmund) let out a roar.

Although his figure was that of a small creature, it began to transform before Raishin’s eyes. A black mist— like some sort of darkness belonging to its true body— began to envelop Sigmund; limbs, claws and wings beginning to form from it.

Finally the mist dissipated, revealing the form of a giant dragon.





A giant dragon that was three metres in height and eight metres in length.

It hadn't simply grown in size. As it grew, its strength also grew in proportion. It was like watching a baby dragon mature into a full-fledged adult.

(It's mass increased as well...?)

Raishin stared in amazement. He had seen automata that could transform before, but this was the first time he was seeing an automaton that could increase in size. He wondered where the extra mass was stored normally when the dragon was in his regular form. Perhaps it was down to some sort of magic circuit running inside him? Many thoughts ran through Raishin's head.

A ray of light could be seen flickering inside the dragon's jaw, much like a tongue.

Sigmund roared, and the atmosphere itself trembled, causing gusts of violent wind to blow. So far, Charl hadn't activated a magic circuit, and yet Sigmund's own body was already displaying a tremendous amount of power.

It was an overwhelming force. His instincts told him this was a strong opponent.

However, that was something he had already known. Raishin grinned slightly, focusing his magic energy.

"Alright, let's show them what we got as well Yaya. SuimeiNijuuyon—"

"Raishin!"

Even without her warning, he had already noticed. In an instant, he threw himself out of the way, dodging to one side. Yaya leapt in the opposite direction, evading the incoming object.

A large iron ball passed through the spot where both of them were standing just moments earlier.

It was about a metre in diameter. Sharp spikes covered its entire surface, giving it a very vicious form.

The iron ball continued on its trajectory, charging straight towards Charl and Sigmund.

Obviously, the both of them weren't going to just sit there and quietly take the attack. Sigmund used his wing to swat the ball away... however, that mystery person's attack didn't stop there.

From the surrounding crowd, a few shadows dashed into the area together.

An armoured doll that looked like a knight, a barefooted girl, and a six-legged beast— it looked like all of them were automata.

The armoured doll charged head on, while the other two leapt in from the right and left, trying to close off any escape. However, their target wasn't Raishin— it was Sigmund!

"Sigmund!"

Charl issued out an order. Even though she hadn't instructed him on what to do, Sigmund seemed to understand her thoughts entirely. Carrying Charl on his back, he flew up into the air.

The armoured doll had barely begun its charge before being smacked away by Sigmund's forelimbs.

With a sweep of his tail, the two bodies approaching him from the sides were sent flying as well. With such simple movements, all three automata were down for the count, the occasional twitch coming from their lifeless bodies.

(She's good... The title of the Rounds isn't just for show.)

Basically, an automaton under control moved according to the puppeteer's will. However, an automaton wasn't just a wooden doll. They were autonomous, which meant they had their own will as well. If the puppeteer didn't synchronise with the automaton properly, then the automaton's movements would be dulled, and the excessive magical energy would be needlessly wasted by the puppeteer.



On that point, Charl and Sigmund were in perfect harmony with each other. If the two of them weren't intimately familiar with each other, there was no way Sigmund could move like that.

However—it was too soon to say that the danger had passed.

Raishin's exceptional kinetic vision allowed him to catch their movements.

Within the crowd, there were a few people who had hostile intents, and were moving secretly whilst hidden within the students.

He could feel nine, ten presences... or even more. Even if half of them were merely puppeteers, that was still a formidable force. Also, that meant they might have the advantage due to their superior numbers.

Before long, they made their move.

Two monster-like figures flew out. It was an undine<sup>1</sup> and a harpy<sup>2</sup>, automata whose designs were based off legendary mythical creatures. The puppeteers behind them had clearly projected their interests and senses onto their automata giving them such designs.

The first to attack was the undine type automaton with the semi-transparent body, which launched a spear-like high pressure jet of water straight at Sigmund.

Sigmund easily dodged, but as he did so, a snow spirit— Jack Frost— approached from the side and unleashed an attack. Sigmund barely managed to dodge the ice-cold magic art that was aimed at him. Although he emerged unscathed, the icy blast had frozen the water from the undine's attack, causing the ground to be frozen as well.

In addition, an attack came from above as well. The harpy type automaton whipped up a fierce gale. Unable to dodge this, Sigmund lost his buoyancy in air and crashed down onto the frozen ground.

Appearing right there was a new opponent. A giant with looks befitting that of a golem charged in.

---

<sup>1</sup> A water nymph. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Undine\\_%28alchemy%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Undine_%28alchemy%29)

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpy>

His legs were unable to gain traction on the slippery ground, so Sigmund couldn't dodge. The golem grabbed onto his wings, robbing him of movement.

The surrounding students began to murmur amongst themselves. Perhaps the time had finally come for the legendary T-Rex?

A horrible sound could be heard as Sigmund's wings began to creak under the pressure. If things remained like that, he would be in danger. However, Sigmund was unable to shake the golem off. Still atop his back, Charl clicked her tongue, and at that moment, the large iron ball flew through the air with a whoosh.

Brimming with tremendous destructive force behind it, the iron ball—

—did not collide with Sigmund.

“...What are you playing at?”

Charl asked in a cold voice.

Raishin ignored the question coming from behind him, and spoke to his partner beside him.

“Let's go, Yaya.”

“If Raishin so desires it, I'll even go to the ends of the Earth for him.”

Yaya replied emphatically, throwing aside the iron ball she had caught.



### Part 4

Charl was completely baffled as she stared at the back of the person in front of her.

The person was the ill-mannered boy who had challenged her to a fight.

To one side was his automaton standing on top on the golem, she was the one who had caught the iron ball.

It took her a few seconds to realise that the two of them had protected her.

And after she did, she was extremely furious.

“... Step aside.”

“I would have even if you didn’t tell me to. After all, I have to get rid of this lot anyway.”

“Stop screwing around. Just what are—”

“What are you doing?”

Someone cut in, finishing the sentence in place of Charl.

An insolent person stepped out arrogantly from amidst the crowd.

Next to him was a female type automaton. The expression on its face didn’t resemble a human’s though, and it was ball jointed. It would be better to say it was doll-like in appearance.

The doll was holding an iron rod. Pointing the tip towards the direction on the iron ball, a thread of light extended forth. A retractable chain of magic energy— it looked like this was some form of a morning star.

(So that iron ball was the head of a morning star...)

Charl didn’t let her guard down, and continued to eye the scene of battle.

Because the field of battle had expanded to accommodate the new arrivals, the students who were watching retreated back. Standing in the widened street were 5 automata: Undine, Jack Frost, Harpy, Golem, and the morning star wielder.

— Actually, that wasn't all of them.

With a whirl, the three units that were defeated rose up.

They had been restored. As she looked around for the cause of their revival, she spotted a white robed automaton in the distance waving a staff. Which meant it possessed a restorative magic art.

With that, the enemy numbered nine in total. Restorative magic art, offensive magic art, someone for defence, someone to perform quick raids, a long range attacker; this formation was exactly like a military unit.

While continuing the agonising contest of strength with the golem, Sigmund emotionlessly muttered out.

“I guess you ARE popular, Charl. Those puppeteers over there are nothing but men.”

“Is this the time and place for that..?”

The insolent youth and his gang were clearly targeting Sigmund. She tried to remember if there was anyone had any sort of grudge against her... and because there was, Charl prepared herself for an uphill battle.

Meanwhile, the insolent youth was continuing his chat with the rude boy.

“Answer me, transfer student. Why are you interfering with us?”

“That thing there is my prey. I will not tolerate someone snatching it away from me.”

Did he just refer to me as that thing!? I'm prey!? What insolence!



“... In that case, we will hand over Lady Belew’s entry qualifications to you. In exchange, will you not consider working alongside us? Having comrades will prove advantageous to you in the Night Party.”

“I refuse.”

The rude boy swiftly turned down the proposal. He didn’t even stop to consider the terms of the offer being proposed to him.

“... Why? It’s not like there’s any disadvantage to you.”

“I dislike the idea of relying on ten men.”

He held up his hand towards the kimono-clad girl. In response to the magic energy he transmitted, the girl kicked the golem away. The huge body looked like it easily surpassed three tonnes in weight, but she sent it flying as easily as she had kicked a rubber ball.

Ooooh, went the gallery.

Able to move freely once again, Sigmund spread his large wings, like he was trying to evaluate the current state of his body.

“I’ll gather them over in one spot here. They’re not used to being herded together—”

He couldn’t finish his sentence. The roar of an explosion overpowered what he said, and he was engulfed by a huge blast of fire in a flash. A fireball had hit the rude youth from behind.

“Gotcha! Ha! Serves you right for letting your guard down!”

There was a shout of joy. Quickly turning around, there was a lone student amidst the gallery doing a little jig of triumph. Beside her was a witch automaton. — An ambush party, so to speak.

The fire faded away. What should have been the charred remains of the youth appearing from within the smoke... turned out to be two people standing there completely unharmed.

The girl had covered her master. Special mention had to go to her remarkable resiliency. Other than her kimono being lightly scorched, her skin showed absolutely no trace of being burnt at all!

Without even turning to look in the ambush party's direction, the youth simply said "Go." The kimono-clad girl burst forward in a blink of an eye, closing in on the witch.

Appearing directly below her, she planted a fierce kick on the witch's jaw.

The witch was launched higher than the school building, shattering apart in mid-air.

What explosive energy! Then again, she did manage to send the huge golem flying.

"What is with that guy..." "Could he actually be... strong?" "He's only the 1235<sup>th</sup> place, right!?"

The gallery was abuzz. The disturbance in the gallery spread to the insolent person's party, causing them to be unnerved.

"This guy's automaton is a top class model! Smash the puppeteer instead!"

The master of the morning star's wielder yelled out. It looked like he was the leader of the gang. The insolent people followed that command, and all started leaping towards the flesh and blood human puppeteer.

The armoured knight thrust his spear, and the golem swung its huge iron fist.

"Woah!"

The rude youth lightly jumped away, dodging and landing neatly onto the ground.

"Isn't aiming for the puppeteer against the rules of the Night Party?"

Even though he said that, it was useless. The insolent gang didn't let up on their attacks.



“Well, if that’s what they’re going to do, then I supposed I better do something on my end too—KouenJuuniketsu!”

“Roger!”

Receiving the command, the girl’s movements changed. With the force of a raging fire, she violently kicked the golem, causing it to crash into the armoured knight like a bullet; she then dashed into the enemy’s midst.

The scene unfolding before her eyes was beyond Charl’s wildest imagination.

Going against traditional Machinart wisdom and common sense, it was an unconventional fighting style.

The rude youth followed closely after the girl. Picking up a piece of the broken automaton the girl had smashed earlier, he threw it, the girl performing a feint so that the opponent was hit by the rude youth.

With the enemy unbalanced, this caused openings in the opponent’s guard, allowing the girl to deal a devastating kick. The power in the girl’s legs easily crushed the automaton’s body, scattering fragments everywhere.

Those movements were simply the pair moving in formation.

It defied common sense, but it didn’t go against it. As a battle tactic it was sure to be consistent in terms of output, and extremely rational.

Charl clicked her tongue. A third-rate puppeteer? He was lying!

While he himself was moving, his doll’s movements were not dull in the slightest.

To control a puppet that well, a strong force— magic energy was needed.

So at the very least, he had undergone a considerable amount of training.

(So the Orientals have this sort of battle style as well...?)

While Charl stared in amazement at the ongoing battle, Sigmund whispered in her ear.

“Charl.”

“... I got it.”

Thanks to the rude youth dancing around amongst them, the insolent gang’s attention had been drawn to him.

Charl began to build up magic energy, allowing it to flow into Sigmund’s magic circuits.

Power began to build, and she waited. Once all the enemies were lined up in a row,

“Raster Cannon!”

A blindingly fierce torrent of light shot forth from Sigmund’s jaw.

It resembled a breath of fire from the dragons of legend. A light so bright it scorched the retinas. Along with the violent blast of light, the molecules in the atmosphere were annihilated, causing a strong vacuum effect.

The beam of light extended for twenty metres, before rapidly decaying, losing its effect. However, that was enough. The insolent gang’s automata were caught in the blast, some getting hit on the arm, some on the leg, and some had half their body hit.

The afflicted parts melted away like candy, the cross section of the remaining parts giving off a curiously smooth luster.

The battle had been decided. And they had lost.

The rude youth could also see that they had been defeated, with all ten bodies out of commission. All the insolent gang could do was to retrieve their puppets and scurry away in a panic.

The surrounding students were at a loss for words, standing where they were dumfounded.

“How scary. The rumours were true; you really do possess such a ridiculously strong power. “



The rude youth spoke in jest. He also had an over-familiar smile on his face.

What a vexing person, if only he had been caught in the Raster Cannon as well.

“Don’t make the absurd mistake of thinking that I needed help.”

“Yes well, you don’t exactly strike me as the sort that needs saving.”

“The result would still have been the same whether a pervert like you was there or not. That goes for your doll over there too.”

For a moment, Charl silently stared at the pair. Then her mood changed slightly, and in a more subdued tone she spoke.

“...Hmph. In any case, tell me your name.”

The rude boy chuckled then introduced himself.

“I’m a puppeteer from Japan. Akabane Raishin.”

“Similarly, Yaya.”

“... No, there’s nothing similar about us.”

“In that case, I’m Yaya, his wife.”

“That’s not it either! I didn’t enter you in the family register or anything, ok!?”

Charl laughed contemptuously at the flustered boy— his named seemed to be Raishin.

“Rye? Sheen? That’s a weird name.”

“It’s not like I like it either! Besides, I’ll have you know that in my country it’s written with the characters for ‘thunder’ and ‘truth’!”

“It doesn’t matter. Let’s just get this over with, seeing as I’m going to crush you in a split second.”

She stretched her hand out towards Sigmund, maintaining the link of magic energy between them.

Raishin didn't move. He just kept staring intently in their direction. His gaze wasn't focused on her though, he was staring at Sigmund.

And then.

"-let's stop."

He turned away abruptly. The students began to murmur amongst themselves, them being as surprised as Charl was.

"I've lost interest. We'll pick up where we left off today some other time."

It was a selfish reason. An indignant Charl trembled with rage.

"Are you messing around...? You're the one who challenged me, and now you're just going to run away..."

Not allowing her to finish, something flashed in his left hand. He had taken something circular from the harness around his waist, and now he threw it on the ground.

A tiny explosion gave way to a large volume of smoke pouring out.

The white smoke completely filled the area. It seemed like it was a smoke bomb, a product from Japan, the land of ninjas.

With a flap of his wings, Sigmund cleared the smoke away. By that time though, the pair had already put a considerable amount of distance between them. Easily jumping over the crowd of people, they ran off into the distance.

The only thing that could be concluded was that she had completely and thoroughly let them escape.

"What a wimp."

"I wonder, is that really the case?"



Giving off a dazzling light, Sigmund reverted back into his smaller form.

“What do you mean?”

Sigmund lowered his voice till the point where the surrounding people couldn't hear him, and answered Charl.

“I think he may have noticed my injury.”

He moved a wing to show her.

“— does it hurt?”

“I just need two to three days to recover.”

An injury meant that he couldn't fly as well as he'd like. If he assumed his larger form, then that would be an even bigger burden.

Charl hadn't noticed it, and yet the youth had?

In that case, did he cut in just now because he had sensed that Charl was at a disadvantage...?

“... Then he really is a wimp. Only a naïve chicken wouldn't have the resolve to attack an enemy's weak point.”

“The Night Party is a merciless struggle for existence. A place where the person who eliminates all other obstacles in the way will obtain everything. A perverted, cowardly idiot like him will be the first to get crushed.”

“I must say, you seem unusually interested in him.”

“Why would you say I'm interested in him?”

“If you really weren't interested, why did you ask for his name?”

“Well, that's—”

She stopped. Now that he had mentioned it, it really was strange. It was something that was hard to explain.

In the end, Charl testily finished her sentence.

“Oh, be quiet. Or else I’ll downgrade your lunchtime chicken to corn.”

Squaring her shoulders, she set off towards the cafeteria.

The surrounding students made way for her. Thus, with a lot of unanswered questions and a little ill feeling left over, the eventful lunch break came to a close.



### Part 5

That night, inside one of the rooms in the Tortoise dormitory.

Raishin tossed and turned in his bed, unable to sleep.

“... Looks like I’m not used to this.”

The scenery from lunch had been burnt into his skull. Parts scattered everywhere, along with shattered automata. The feeling he had at the point of their destruction, and the dull response to it.

Raishin shook his head, chasing away the nausea building up.

“Did you say something?”

While hanging out the laundry, Yaya turned around with a smile on her face.

“— No. Just thinking that this room is so worn out, if you kicked a wall the whole place would fall apart.”

He pointed up at the cracked, filthy ceiling.

The mouldy air filled his lungs, and staring at the sooty walls made him depressed. Although Yaya had washed the sheets clean, the bed creaked noisily, making it hard for him to sleep soundly.

He thought he would get used to it in three days, but that wasn’t the case.

In fact, he noticed the longer he had stayed here the more his dissatisfaction had grown.

“Well, I guess it is spacious... and it’s better than just having a bed.”

Why muttering to himself, Raishin tossed and turned in his bed.

The room's size was 12 jou<sup>1</sup>, and came with a study desk and closet. As it was originally meant for two students, there was another bed on the opposite end.

"That's right, Raishin. Divine punishment comes to those who do nothing but grumble."

Yaya grinned happily.

Even if they were alone together, Yaya was unusually happier than normal.

"... You're glad we don't have a roommate, aren't you?"

"Yes <3"

Whether it should be labelled obstinacy or tenacity, Yaya was prone to the odd rampage. Even if he did have a roommate, who knew what devious trick she would pull to eliminate said roommate?

"By the way, what are we doing tomorrow? Are you going to challenge someone again?"

"I'll think about it tomorrow. For now it's time to sleep."

"I understand. Good night, Raishin."

"Yeah... wait-wait-wait!"

He pushed away the thing creeping into his bed.

"Your bed is over there!"

"But Yaya was hurt in battle today. And I think I got burnt a little too."

"What does that have to do with anything!?"

---

<sup>1</sup> jou is a counter used to measure room size in Japan. For more details, see:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_units\\_of\\_measurement#Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_units_of_measurement#Area)

“Didn’t you know? We automata function off a puppeteer’s magic energy. When we’re damaged, the closer we are to the puppeteer the faster we’ll recover.”

“... Now that you mention it, I think that was the case...”

Raishin’s displeasure was plainly displayed on his face.

Yaya sat at the foot of his bed, staring at him with puppy dog eyes.

Looking at her, she had no external injuries. However, he had no clue about her internal system. Because she herself had said she was injured, he wondered if that was true.

If she was, then it was Raishin’s responsibility. That battle had been down to his selfishness alone.

“... I guess it can’t be helped then. If that’s the case, then I guess we can sleep together.”

“Ok. <3”

“However, you cannot do anything weird.”

“I won’t. I won’t do anything weird.”

“I think I phrased it wrongly. Don’t touch me.”

“... Tch.”

“Did you just click your tongue? Why did you click your tongue?”

“If an automaton comes into direct contact with the puppeteer, they will recover much, much faster.”

“That’s a lie! Get out! I think I’ll sleep alone after all!”

Yaya was waiting for an opening, and Raishin was maintaining his defence line to the death. Fireworks sparked between them as an uneasy equilibrium was reached.



## Chapter 1 – One Who Hunts Dragons

---

Thus, Raishin had a sleepless night.

### Part 6

The clear moonlight illuminated the campus at night.

It was one in the morning. All the respectable, decent students were already fast asleep.

It was so quiet you'd have thought everyone had gone extinct, but then a hidden shadow began to move.

At the outskirts of the garden, in a grove of trees hidden from any possible gazes, a pair of eyes shone in the darkness.

The silhouette was vague and indistinct. It was crawling on all fours, devouring something messily.

The thing the shadow was devouring had arms, legs and a head.

Its eyes were open. It's popped out eyeball told the story of its final scary moments, the death agony it underwent. A large iron ball had been embedded into its crushed legs, and a substance similar to blood was spurting from the area. Face up on the ground, the torso had been cannibalised, making it look like a corpse.

However, this wasn't a human body.

Underneath its broken skin, countless cords and metal cylinders could be seen.

It was an automaton. The shadow was eating an automaton.

Tearing open the body, it ripped out the internal circuitry. It looked like a man eating demon as it wordlessly devoured the body with great gusto, slurping up the excess oil.

The shadow continued its meal long after the moon had finally set, only finishing once the eastern sky had started to turn white.

## Chapter 2

### A Fleeting Encounter

#### Part 1

Although he knew it was just a dream, Raishin found himself once more in that same one.

“Nadeshiko!”

The black smoke got into his eyes. His lungs felt like they were on fire. His instincts were telling him he shouldn’t be here for even a second longer. A fear deeper than anything he had ever felt assailed him, screaming at him to get out of there.

However, Raishin ran forward, bursting through the flames. He went deeper inside.

“Nadeshiko, where are you!?”

Kicking down the sliding doors, he searched for his little sister. He shouted for her, till the point his throat felt like it was going to rip itself apart.

If there ever was such a thing as a premonition of destruction, Raishin was having one now.

Please let me make it in time, he thought. As he ran, he kept thinking about how he had to hurry. And also, no matter how fast he hurried, it was probably already too late.

With a loud crack like thunder, an overhead beam collapsed. At that moment,

“Brother...”

He could hear a faint voice.

“Nadeshiko! Are you here!?”



He braked abruptly. Changing direction in the middle of the hallway, he yanked open the screen leading to a large room.

What awaited Raishin inside was—

### Part 2

“Think of magic circuits as a substitution for rituals, or as a certain kind of engine. In the same way steam powers a cog wheel or a gear, the flow of magical energy allows magic arts to be born. Obviously, compared to the simple turn of a wheel, magic arts allows for more complicated outputs—”

A cruelly curt and efficient voice was accompanied by the monotonous scraping of chalk on a blackboard.

The lecture room was shaped like an old theatre. Students sat in neatly arranged seats, the seats getting higher as they went further back. Raishin was somewhere in the middle, and was currently in Kimberly’s lecture.

This was the first time he was attending a lecture in person, but to tell the truth, he was feeling sleepy.

Stifling a yawn, he took a quick look around the classroom.

The students had serious expressions on their faces and automata were mixed in with the student body. The only automata he could see, however, were those that had human-like shapes or those of small animals. The ones with large bodies had to wait outside the lecture room in a specially constructed space.

Next to Raishin, Yaya was diligently copying down notes. Since Raishin could neither read nor write English, Yaya copied what was being written on the blackboard in his place.

Suddenly, he was aware of a pair of blue eyes staring in his direction.

It was Charl. Three rows in front of him, seated to his right, she was furtively stealing glances in his direction.

Once their eyes met, Charl quickly turned to face the front.

Several seconds passed with her hiding her face behind a textbook.

This time she only moved her eyes as she glanced behind. Their eyes met again, but now they bore killing intent, her thorny gaze piercing through him.

(Just what does she want now...?)

While Raishin was pondering over whether to return her glare—

Something hard hit him between the eyes.

“Raishin! Are you ok, Raishin!?”

Yaya was flustered. Wracked with pain, Raishin rubbed his forehead.

It was a white fragment that felt powdery— Chalk dust.

Gingerly lifting up his head, he saw Kimberly staring right at him. Behind her glasses an icy shimmer filled her eyes.

It looked like she had thrown the chalk. What scary control.

“You have some nerve ignoring my lecture, Second Last. For whose sake do you think I’ve dumbed down the lecture and have to teach in this boring way?”

“New students like me, and students who have poor results?”

“Wrong. It’s for the new student who has poor results.”

“I apologise for that, Professor Kimberly. It’s just that I haven’t gotten enough sleep.”

“I see. And I suppose you’re going to tell me you’ve been having bad dreams as well?”

“It’s like you see right through me.”

“You’ve got guts. Fine, I’ll let you off this time but in exchange, answer this question. What is the most popular magic circuit right now?”

“Well, that’s—“

He thought it was a simple question, but he couldn’t answer promptly. Raishin tilted his head.



“Heat... No. Kinetic... That’s not it either. Photic... generation?”

Kimberly let out a long, deep sigh, like she was challenging her own lung capacity.

“Tell him, Charlotte.”

Charl was caught by surprise at the sudden change in target,

“... Eve’s Heart.”

“Correct.”

There was a buzz amongst the students.

“Demerits to those idiots who just opened their mouths.”

With a fresh piece of chalk in hand, Kimberly wrote down the word ‘Vital’ in large letters on the blackboard.

“Just like Charlotte said, it’s the magic circuit that gives all automata life— Eve’s Heart is embedded inside them. This circuit is the reason why automata have autonomous movement.”

She continued on in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Two different types of magic art cannot reside in the same body— this is the fundamental basis of machine physics, the Magic Activity Dissonance Theory. However, there is one exception to this theory.”

In other words, that was the Eve’s Heart circuit. Almost all automata came equipped with a different magic circuit, in addition to Eve’s Heart.

“You could say the history of Machinart only began after this circuit was discovered. Whether you want to call it the source, origin, beginning, or the starting point, to this day it’s very much an unexplained black box. Reproducing the circuit itself is comparatively easy as opposed to developing it further, which is said to be pretty much impossible.”

Because the circuit had been popularised to such an extent, every workshop had at least one master versed in reproducing it. Because this 'Life' was easy to generate, automata themselves were ubiquitous as well.

"Eve's Heart is an extremely flexible circuit. Not only can it confer intelligence to puppets, in the hands of a skilled puppeteer both breathing and perspiration functions can be reproduced, as well as digestion of food. Although how useful these functions will be in battle, I cannot say."

Kimberly's lips twisted into a cynical smile.

"If you wanted a reason for mimicking a human, then it would be for situations where your automaton has to mingle amongst humans—Infiltration or intelligence gathering. Having said that, all puppeteers like to have their dolls be pseudo human, in terms of both outward appearance and inner functions. I mean really, what a bunch of fanatics. Isn't that right, Second Last?"

While saying that, Kimberly's gaze was focused not on Raishin but Yaya who was sitting next to him. Embarrassed, Yaya wished there was a hole in the ground for her to hide herself in, but since there wasn't she could only hang her head slightly.

"I don't know what you're trying to imply by saying that, but..."

Slamming his elbows onto the table, Raishin spoke in a threatening voice.

"This one here is the world's greatest automaton."

Her black eyes becoming moist, Yaya stared at Raishin, overcome with emotion.

"Raishin...!"

"Because she was created by Shouko."

A vein popped.

"... Yaya, what's wrong? What's with that demonic look on your face? Wait a minute, calm down!"

“Again with Shouko... Always Shouko this and Shouko that...”

Yaya was sobbing while throttling Raishin, violently shaking him back and forth.

The surrounding students were unable to hold back their laughter.

“I see. So my lesson is that boring, is it?”

Kimberly had an icy expression on her face as she pointed outside the window.

“Then to stave off the boredom, go clean the great hall. — Get out now!”



### Part 3

The bell rang, signifying the start of lunch break.

“Dammit...! Because of you we have to perform needless manual labour.”

Raishin was grumbling while using a mop to clean up. Although he was grumbling, he was dutifully cleaning the great hall, an action which could either be attributed to integrity or a refusal to quit once he had started something.

Yaya was still sobbing. It seemed like she was still affected by the snide remark earlier.

“That’s enough crying. Was Professor Kimberly’s sarcasm that much of a shock to you?”

“Uu... Raishin is an idiot.”

“That was unexpected. Well, it’s not like I can disagree with that statement.”

Tidying up the cleaning equipment, they left the great hall— or rather, he did so, but Yaya obstinately remained inside unmoving, continuing to sniffle instead.

Raishin was at his wits end. He sighed loudly.

Grabbing on to Yaya’s hand,

“Come on, cheer up. Let’s go grab something to eat.”

“O-ok...<3”

Raishin led a now cheerful Yaya by the hand, and this time they did exit the great hall.

Outside the great hall, students were already thronging the main street.

A large volume of students spilled out from the various buildings and lecture halls.

Most of them were headed towards the centre of the main street, where the cafeteria was located. The sight of so many people heading towards a single location made Raishin think they were heading towards a demonstration or starting an insurrection.

Going with the flow, Raishin and Yaya moved with the crowd. Receiving gazes from the surrounding people, after a walking a while they saw a modern looking building, one side of which was completely made up of glass.

“So that’s the rumoured steel reinforced concrete, huh? It looks very different from the dining hall in the dormitory.”

Entering, the difference became even more distinct.

Firstly, the ceiling was high up. White tables with modern designs were lined up in rows inside a bright and spacious environment, making it look very hygienic and clean.

As Raishin had exited a lecture for the first time today, it went without saying that this was his first time at the cafeteria as well.

While standing there like an idiot, a delicious smell wafted over and he turned towards its direction.

Jutting out from the wall, directly outside the kitchen, huge quantities of food were lined up in a row. Large plates and metal cutlery were stacked up next to an assortment of meat dishes, fish dishes, salads and a selection of breads.

The students had queued up in a line, loading their massive plates with the food.

This was a different system than the dormitory. In the dining hall of the dormitory, you’d select an item from the menu, and then eat whatever you got.

“Look, Yaya. Everyone’s just helping themselves to the food.”

“Can we just take what we want, then?”

“Looks like it. I don’t really get how this works, but when in Rome...”

Hunger and a lack of sleep were clouding his judgment. Not thinking any deeper about the situation, Raishin joined the tail of the line. Even here he was the centre of attention, but it was a regular occurrence by now and so he ignored it. Grabbing a tray, he placed a plate atop it and started helping himself to the food.

As he advanced, the head of the queue came into sight, and Raishin finally realised his mistake.

There was a cash register at the end of the queue!

Nimbly operating the register, a lady was receiving bits of paper from the students.

“I have to pay!?”

Raishin was mortified. He wasn’t expecting money to change hands. Then again, it should have been obvious. Even the food expenses in the dormitory were under a separate account from the basic lodging fee.

Getting a bad feeling in his gut, Raishin turned around and stretched out his hand.

“Yaya, hand me my wallet.”

“It’s in the dormitory locker.”

“... So you have nothing?”

“Nope.”

“... What are we going to do now?”

While the exchange occurred, the line advanced steadily onward. To go against the flow of traffic now would be weird, not to mention returning the food back to where it came from. To do so would violate common etiquette, something even a foreigner like Raishin knew.

“... Do you think they’d let me put it on my tab?”



“There’s no such thing as a tab here. You really, reaaaalllly are the biggest blockhead ever.”

An extremely thorny voice flew over from behind him.

Turning around, he saw the familiar face of a girl standing two students behind him.

Gorgeous golden hair, blue eyes, and her trademark dragon companion.

“Charl—”

“Don’t address me with such familiarity. You should address me as Miss Belew.”

Had she always been this close? Raishin wondered. Today it seemed her gaze was fiercer than usual; however it looked like she wasn’t glaring daggers at Raishin, but rather, the girl standing behind him.

The two boys sandwiched between them turned pale, and offered to let Charlotte move ahead in the line. Charl gave a curt “Thank you.”, and walked over towards Raishin.

Rummaging through her pocket, she took out three one pound notes—

And handed them to Raishin.

This was an unexpected action. Raishin was taken aback, but to turn down the offer would be crass of him. Politely lowering his head, he gratefully accepted the money.

“Sorry for the trouble.”

“Say ‘thank you very much’ properly.”

After paying for both his and Yaya’s portions, he exited the queue. Waiting after he had paid at the register, Charl followed after and wordlessly thrust a notebook in his face.

It was an excessively elegant notebook, and there was something written in it.

Because it had been scribbled quickly, he couldn't read it. Raishin turned to Yaya for help, and she read it aloud in a small voice,

"I will pay Charlotte Belew four pounds."

"It's an IOU. If you value your life, you'll sign it."

"Are you trying to rob me? And why is there interest?"

"Of course there's interest. There's no need for me to feed a pervert like you for free after all."

"Don't call me a pervert. And fine, I'll pay you back four pounds."

While Raishin struggled to sign his name with alphabets he wasn't used to,

"How're you feeling, Sigmund?"

A little surprised, the small dragon resting on top of Charlotte's cap raised his head.

"I'm fine. It was just a light scratch."

"That's good to hear. There you go, Charl."

He returned the notebook. "What's this horrible scrawl?" went Charl, but she seemed satisfied enough that Raishin had signed it, and moved to walk away from them.

"Wait. Since you're already here, let's eat together."

"Wha—"

Both Yaya and Charl exclaimed. It must have been a great shock, for the plate on Yaya's tray started to rattle, and Charl almost dropped her pasta and chicken.

Charl's mouth wordlessly opened and closed, like a goldfish.

Then the slits of her eyes were raised in indignation.

"I refuse. Why would I want to dine with a pervert like you?"

"Don't be like that. Aren't we comrade in arms who've fought beside each other?"

"Don't be ridiculous. That was because you selfishly— speaking of which, in the first place you were the insolent pervert that challenged me to battle. Why would I ever dine with a man like that..? Ah I get it. Putting it simply, you must be an idiot. An idiot with a death wish. A sorry, pitiful excuse of a man."

She was being very blunt. Charl continued her verbal assault with Raishin unable to get a word in edgewise.

However, he didn't give up. He followed after Charl with a nonchalant look on his face, taking the fact that she didn't try to escape as a good sign, and sat down on a seat opposite her.

Charl stared at him dumbfounded, but she didn't say a thing, relapsing into a silent frown. Grabbing her fork, she stabbed viciously at her tomato pasta.

It was obviously she had been thrown off her rhythm. Raishin was left wondering how to deal with this awkward situation.

Sigmund saw none of this as his concern, and started to chomp away at his chicken with gusto.

Yaya had gone into a dark silence. She hadn't even touched her sandwich, radiating an unsettling presence instead. However Raishin just ignored her and started talking to Charl.

"Why have you gone silent? Does your stomach hurt or something?"

"... I'm really astounded. Does your impudence know no bounds? Even your nerves are as idiotic as you. Besides, I'm keeping quiet because I'm bored. As a man, shouldn't you be the one creating conversations that arouse my interest?"



“Oh? So you’re saying you want to be turned on?”

“What...grrr.... Sigmund! Destroy this idiot this instant!”

“Calm down Charl. Let me finish my chicken first.”

“Be quiet, or starting tomorrow I’ll feed you nothing but dog food. Now hurry up and—”

Mid-sentence, she noticed a change in Raishin.

His eyes were fixed on something on the opposite side of the glass wall, like he was trying to devour it with his eyes.

“Hey. Did something just happen?”

However, Raishin didn’t reply.—He didn’t have the composure to reply.

Charl pouted in a huff,

“Ignore me? You’re just going to ignore me? Just who do you think you are, you rude fellow!”

“That’s...!”

He couldn’t tear his eyes away. Raishin’s eyeballs followed after that figure.

He had a silver mask, and was draped in a black cloak. He struck a gallant figure, but at the same time, had an air of composure around him as he walked.

For a brief moment, a horrifying sight flashed before his eyes.

### Part 4

Raishin ripped the door open with enough force to tear it.

After entering the reception hall of the estate, that's when he saw it. If he had to put it into words, then it would have been best described as hell.

Even amidst the sea of fire, it was obvious. The choking stench of blood.

The fearsome amount of blood everywhere.

Piled up in heaps, the countless number of corpses.

A larger number of those were the remnants of automata. Crushed, broken, and scattered everywhere, their frameworks twisted, and their broken gears strewn about. Coupled with the large holes in the wall and the torn tatami flooring, they told the story of the fierce battle that had occurred here.

And finally, there was a shadow standing in the middle of the corpses.

It was as though it was a ghost, or a demon.

It kicked away a body that was at its feet.

"Old man...!"

The crown of his skull had been split and his countenance had changed, but there was no mistaking it, it was the head of the Akabane clan.

Surrounding his father were the bodies of his other relatives. His uncles, aunts and his cousins. All bearing the name of Akabane, and all master puppeteers in their own right.

His head felt like it was burning up as he thought. What was this? Am I having a nightmare?

It didn't feel real.

However, the heat and the smell assaulted him, telling him to face reality.

Slowly, he turned to face the thing in front of him he had been intentionally keeping out of his sight.

He wanted to believe that it was something he had mistakenly saw, or a fear induced hallucination.

But that thing was still there.

On the opposite side of the shadow, something that could be called an altar had been erected, and something had been put to rest there, and there it lay silently.

The first thought that came to mind was moulting.

If you cut open a body vertically and emptied the insides, then this should be what it would look like, right?

What was on the altar was a body that had its insides removed.

You couldn't call it just skin because it still had plenty of flesh attached—

And it was too empty to be called a corpse, making it a decidedly warped existence.

From the clothes and the body size, as well as the skin and limbs, he knew all too well whose corpse this was.

This was.

“Nadeshiko...!”

What was in front of him was something that was once his sister.

Unable to bear it, a cry of anguish and despair burst forth from Raishin's throat.

In response, the older brother silently looked down upon the younger with nothing but an icy gaze of steel.



### Part 5

Raishin wondered if he had been noticed or not.

The male student with the silver mask crossed the street without even so much as a glance in his direction.

There were two people— or rather, two bodies following him.

Adorned with frills and lace, they were clad in beautiful dresses. The dresses had a kinky aesthetic to them. In vogue with the late nineteenth century trends, their scent was that of death and decadence. Both girls were breathtakingly beautiful, but also clearly unworldly.

Glancing between the outside scenery and Raishin's hard gaze, Charl spoke in a surprised voice.

"That's the Magnus, isn't it? What, are you going to target him this time?"

"Yaya."

"Yes."

Raishin and Yaya stood up. Charl also rose to her feet with a start.

"Wait... Are you serious!? Hold on a second!"

She grabbed on to Raishin's arm— and flinched.

Raishin's eyes had a brutal glint in them. Charl quickly withdrew her hand, but summoned up enough courage to issue him a warning.

"I won't say anything bad. Just give up on him now. He's someone you definitely cannot win against."

"Definitely?"

"Yes. He's head and shoulders above everyone in terms of techniques and magical energy. His combined scores are the highest of any generation, and since he started at this academy he's been hailed as a genius. A one-man

force who uses six automata simultaneously. At this point in time, he's considered the closest person to the Wiseman— hey, Raishin!"

He didn't stay to hear the end. Raishin was already starting to walk off.

"Unfortunately, I'm a hard-headed idiot. I need to try for myself before I understand."

With quick feet, he left the table.

Bursting out of the cafeteria, he called out to the back of the black coat.

"Wait up, you masked freak. Or should I call you Magnus?"

The male student— Magnus stopped.

The two female automata stepped in front of him as a protective measure.

Upon seeing one of them, a maiden with pink hair, Raishin's face involuntarily twisted into a grimace. A searing pain hit his chest so intense he thought smoke was going to come out, and he couldn't keep his calm composure anymore.

That doll's resemblance was excessively so.

"Yo. Having your dolls wait upon you as you take a walk? As always, you have the worst hobbies ever."

"... Who are you?"

"Don't break my heart now. I flew all this way from the other side of the world just to meet you."

Although his tone of voice was light, Raishin was acutely aware that his core was burning up.

If you hated someone you'd generate wrath at them. However, even though Raishin was keeping his anger under control, wrath was pouring out from him calmly and quietly.

Even if he kept his voice low and killed off his emotions, wrath continued to spill from his body. Students walking on the streets came to a halt and students eating in the cafeteria stopped to stare in their direction, where it looked like a massacre was about to take place.

Magnus stared at Raishin intently, before finally speaking in a calm voice.

“It seems like you have mistaken me for someone else.”

“If that’s what you think, so be it. However, I just have something I want to give you—”

While talking, Raishin lifted his arm, and in that split second,

Something happened, but Raishin couldn’t comprehend what went on.

Like a bouquet of flowers had been thrust towards him, his lungs were filled with a sweet floral fragrance.

The fluffy feel of frill tickled his nose, and his vision was blocked off. His hands and feet were in contact with the soft skin of a girl. Finally, numerous blades were held at his throat.

Exactly like a flower bouquet, Raishin was enveloped in a sea of colour that was hair, eyes and dresses.

There was someone standing behind him, and someone in front of him. There was also someone on his shoulders. He didn’t know where they had appeared from, but now various swords, spears, and daggers were pressed against his skin.

A total of six automata had pounced on Raishin at the same time.

Where had they appeared from? And when did they appear?

Up till this moment, he hadn’t sensed the presence of the other four units.

“Raishin!”



Yaya moved to help him, but the blade against his throat dug deeper in response. With that, Yaya couldn't do anything, or Raishin's head would roll before she could even act.

"You ladies are so hasty."

With a wry smile, Raishin slowly reached for the harness around his waist.

"Don't be so rash. Since we have just made each other's acquaintance, I just wanted to present this token to you as a gift."

Opening a pouch, he removed a small bottle from within.

There was some sort of black powder inside. Considering the situation he was in, it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine it was some sort of explosive.

"... Stand down."

At Magnus's command, the dolls withdrew their weapons.

The pink haired maiden retrieved the bottle from Raishin's hand and deposited it into Magnus's.

"I thank you for this gift."

With only those words, Magnus and his Squadron departed from the scene.

"Raishin...! Are you hurt anywhere, Raishin....!?"

Crying while running over, Yaya clung on to him.

"I'm sorry, so sorry....! You brought Yaya along, and yet...!"

"...I finally get it, Yaya."

"Eh...?"

"The only way I can get close to him is in a fair fight..."

He was covered in cold sweat. Now that it over, his knees were trembling.

His instincts and his very spirit itself were frightened.

Charl wasn't lying earlier. The way he was at the moment—

He definitely wouldn't be able to win.

Any surprise attack would be useless. Personal attacks would only shorten his lifespan. If he wanted to defeat Magnus, doing so under the limits set in place by the rules of the Night Party would be the most sensible.

Nevertheless, he still couldn't see any way of victory even down that route. The reality was if they did engage in battle, it would only last a second.

Raishin had been training himself so that he would be fight at his maximum during battle.

He was utilising Yaya's potential at 120%.

He had compiled countless cunning battle techniques, all designed to outwit the enemy.

With all these, was there even a ten percent chance that he could reach his goal?

(Will I ever reach his level...!?)

The difference in their strength was overwhelming. The gap was as great as diving off a cliff.

He felt the ground beneath his feet turn to mush, and his body felt like it was sinking down into the earth.

Having been forced to realise the difference in power, he felt his willpower draining away. But at that moment—

Clap, clap, clap. Someone was openly applauding him.

"The rumours are true about you. Barely four days into your enrolment, and you're already baring your teeth at the Marshal."

Turning around, he saw a solitary male student who had a friendly smile on his face.

With smooth, beautiful hair, he was a very handsome lad. If you squinted, he almost looked like a beautiful girl. His voice had a distinct and clear quality to it, sounding like an exceptional stringed instrument.

Greeting Raishin with a captivating smile,

“Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mister Akabane. If it’s alright with you, won’t you give me a moment of your time?”

### Part 6

Among the puppeteers, there were those who aimed to become puppet craftsmen.

Using and creating were not the same things. Originally it was considered two completely separate skillsets, and the training structures were completely separate... however, it went without saying that there were a considerable number of aspects that overlapped with each other.

With that in mind, the academy introduced the Machine Technical Vocations course, as well as prepared dedicated facilities for those who wanted to become puppet craftsmen.

The place Magnus was headed to now was the Machine Technical Vocations building.

With the maidens following after him in succession, he branched off the main street onto a smaller road. As he neared the school building, just in front of a grove of trees, he stopped unexpectedly.

It was the young professor of the Machine Physics department, Kimberly. Although good looking, it was her roughness that stood out rather than her beauty. She wasn't wearing her glasses, which she normally would have if she was giving a lecture.

Reacting to her presence, Magnus's puppets alter their stances subtly.

However, Kimberly didn't pay them the slightest bit of attention, and began to casually chat with him in a light manner.

"How did you find Second Last?"

"... What do you mean by that?"



“Isn’t he an interesting fellow? What do you think were his first words when he received his test results? I believe they were ‘what should I do to get into the Night Party?’, if you can believe that. “

“The Night Party—“

“Isn’t it laughable?”

“... No. If there were to be any upsets, then it will be by his hand.”

“Oh? Someone of your standard has that high an opinion of that guy?”

Magnus didn’t reply. He could guess Kimberly’s intentions, and it discomforted him.

“Well let’s leave it at that. What’s that?”

Unfolding her crossed arms, she pointed at Magnus’s hand.

It was the small bottle filled with powder that he had received from Raishin just earlier.

“Without proper analysis of its composition I cannot say. However if I were to venture a guess, I’d say it’s probably ash.”

“Ash?”

She had a surprised look on her face. After a moment, she realised where she was standing—near the Machine Technical Vocations Building— and grinned.

“I see. While you are an excellent puppeteer, you are also a puppet craftsman. And a very skilled one at that too. For a craftsman of your level, it shouldn’t be a problem to take the ash—which is such high quality material for magic arts— and use it to create a puppet.”

Magnus didn’t answer. However, Kimberly took his silence as a sign of affirmation.

“Although, it’s really strange. Why would Second Last pass something like that to you of all people?”

“... He was throwing down the gauntlet. A symbol to mark a showdown.”

He suddenly muttered. Kimberly raised her eyebrows in puzzlement.

“In a certain Oriental clan, throwing the ash of a dead person signifies vengeance for the deceased.”

“... Does he have some sort of grudge against you?”

As expected, Magnus didn’t answer.

“If there’s nothing else, I’ll excuse myself now.”

“By the way, Magnus.”

Magnus passed by her, but Kimberly cut him off with her interjection.

“Have you heard about this rumour? I’m not sure who started it, but rumour has it that each and every one of your puppets is a Bandoll.”

Once again, Magnus stopped in his tracks. Kimberly continued,

“I’m talking about living machines. Using a human’s flesh and blood as parts. Not ash or remains, but turning parts of a living human into material. Such parts would have vastly superior affinity with magic energy as compared to remains or a memento... But, obviously, this is a violation of the code of ethics all mages must follow.”

Her words were disguised as casual gossip, but her whole body was radiating a sort of tension akin to killing intent.

Magnus’s dolls had picked up on it, and faced Kimberly with hostility.

Kimberly had a cruel smile on her face, like it had been carved with a knife.

“Can I ask you to clarify that for me?”

“... Is this an interrogation?”

“Chalk it up to personal curiosity.”

Magnus appeared to think for a moment—

“In accordance with the guidelines for the Night Party, there is no rule that states you cannot use a Bandoll.”

Was all he said.

Kimberly’s eyes sharpened, like a sword that had been honed with a grindstone.

“... Can I take that as your answer?”

“If you want to, Professor Kimberly.”

Without a proper goodbye, he left. His footsteps were those of a person brimming with self-confidence, steady and assured.

Compared to him, even his dolls were more humanlike. As if they were warning Kimberly, they repeatedly looked over their shoulders as they followed behind after Magnus.

As they walked away in a line, Kimberly let out a huge sigh, followed by a wry smile.

“Really, what a fearsome guy you are. To be able to create Bandolls at such a young age... If the Maestros at the workshops caught word of this, they would definitely become depressed.”

Gazing at the back of the boy disappearing into the Machine Technical Vocations building, Kimberly muttered.

“Also, Magnus. Who exactly did you turn into material?”

Obviously, there was no one around to answer that question.



### Part 7

Give a moment of your time, or so the handsome lad had said.

At first glance, Raishin didn't feel any ill intentions coming from him. He was smiling, and the figure of his automata was nowhere to be found.

Raishin glanced at his left arm. He wore an arm band laced with gold that sparkled, catching his eye.

The letters 'Censor' had been embroidered on with a refined calligraphic script. In other words, he was part of the discipline committee.

Also, he was wearing a white glove with gold thread embroidery.

In short, this person was also someone who was qualified to participate in the upcoming Night Party.

A discipline committee member with excellent grades. Raishin couldn't think of a reason to doubt him.

"Rather than stand here and talk, why don't we head inside? Unless I'm mistaken, you were in the middle of lunch, correct?"

The handsome lad pointed to the cafeteria with a smile on his face. He was trying to get Raishin to relax— or to put it in another way; his smiling was tempting him to let his guard down. His malice free manner could prove to be poison in the form of gentleness. Raishin remained cautious, but since he didn't have a reason to turn him down, he followed him back into the cafeteria. Yaya followed quickly after him.

Entering into the cafeteria, the students started to buzz. In particular, the numbers of female gazes directed at him were exceptionally large. He was used to being stared at, but this was his first time being stared at positively.

"Felix!"

Back at his table, Charl's head bounced up. Although her face wasn't particularly dirty, she hurriedly dabbed a paper napkin to her mouth.

The handsome lad cheerily grinned at her,

"Hey there, Charl. May I join you?"

"N-n-no, obviously you c-can't!"

"That's so cold. And how cruel of you. All this time I've been asking and you haven't given me so much as a 'yes', but here I find you sitting with him so readily."

"Th-that is because he just did as he pleased— do you have any business with me?"

"I would like for you to go out on a date with me."

"I r-r-refuse. I s-s-strongly decline. W-w-why me anyway?"

"Just kidding, of course—not really, but today I'm here because of a different reason."

His smooth golden hair fluttered as he turned to face Raishin.

"I have something to discuss with you, Raishin Akabane."

Charl and Yaya stiffened in shock. Then they slowly glanced over at Raishin timidly. From the expression on their faces it was clear they had jumped to some weird conclusion.

Raishin remained silently in his seat, putting some cold pork into his mouth.

It had gone cold, but it hadn't turned hard yet. Enjoying the flavour of the meat juices mixed with the sauce, he chewed and swallowed. After taking his time to do so,

“If you’re asking me for a date, are you sure you’re good enough?”

“Come now, don’t say that. I assure you I’m the sort who won’t bore you.”

“I’m surprised. What could a member of the Rounds, as well as a vital cornerstone of the academy’s autonomy— Head of the disciplinary committee Felix Kingsfort possibly want from me, someone who’s Second Last?”

“I’m the one who should be surprised, since you know so much about my existence. Were you planning to target me after Charl?”

The atmosphere became strained.

Felix was smiling as usual, and his voice had no trace of hostility, but the tension was broadcasted throughout the cafeteria, causing the commotion caused by the students to stop in an instant.

The first to break the tension was Felix.

“Won’t you work with me?”

With a carefree expression, he abruptly posed the question to Raishin.

“Hmm, rather than saying work with me, consider it a request. Not as an individual, but as the head of the disciplinary committee.”

“I refuse.”

Felix chuckled.

“I see. So you’re the type that makes swift decisions, Raishin. However, won’t you at least take some time to think this over? At least let me explain the situation.”

“That won’t be necessary. I don’t wish to gain any more partners than I already have.”

“Not even if we were to offer you—“

Irritatingly, he deliberately took his time to finish his sentence.

“—an entry qualification to the Night Party?”

Raishin’s fork stopped moving.

An entry qualification to the Night Party. Something Raishin had to obtain at all cost.

As their gazes met, a stifling silence descended.

Was this a devil’s invitation, or perhaps something else...?



## **Chapter 3**

### **An Invitation to Chaos**

#### **Part 1**

Once the afternoon lecture had ended, Raishin and Yaya exited the lecture hall.

With Sigmund resting atop her head, Charl watched them through a window in the hall.

The sun was setting, and the outside grounds were becoming dim.

As twilight descended, Raishin met up with Felix, and the two of them cut through the front yard.

The figure of Felix's back slowly vanished into the distance. Charl felt a slight warmth throughout her body, and her chest hurt at the same time. Watching them go off brought about an unbearable feeling.

"Are you interested?"

Sigmund asked a sharp question.

"N-n-n-no I'm not. Don't say such i-i-idiotic things."

"You don't have to hide it. He really is an interesting guy."

"H-h-he's not interesting at all. I'll feed you green peas from now on."

"I'm not referring to Felix. I'm talking about Raishin."

"Eh—"

While blushing, Charl pondered over Sigmund's words.

"...Really? Isn't he just a regular insolent pervert?"

“Remember. In the cafeteria, he asked me how I was feeling.”

“What about it?”

“That means he treated me as a distinct individual.”

“—”

“It might because of the automaton he himself possesses, but he doesn’t treat other automata as literal puppets. Normally, he wouldn’t have addressed me, but would have asked you ‘how’s the condition of your puppet?’.”

Now that he mentioned it, it was certainly odd.

“During the Machine Physics lecture, his automaton throttled his neck, correct?”

“You mean during their lover’s quarrel?”

“He was being strangled. The other students were laughing at him. That’s probably because they thought he couldn’t completely control his own automaton.”

Charl suddenly realised it.

Sigmund was right. That scenario wasn’t possible, and she knew it. Even if he was a little rough around the edges, he was still an excellent puppeteer— brimming with powerful magical energy.

If he felt like it, he could have easily stopped Yaya at any time.

“This is what I think— He’s a rather sentimental sort of person.”

Sigmund gave a little chuckle as he spoke.

He was poking fun at Raishin, but it was clear he had left a good impression on Sigmund. It was possible that Sigmund had become interested in Raishin himself.

“Don’t you think the two of you get along rather well?”

“... There’s no way that’s possible with that pervert. Plus, I’m a realist. I don’t mix with sentimental fools.”

“You’re a realist?”

“... Are you laughing?”

“No. However, let me pose a question to you.”

Sigmund’s voice became stern.

“He was already helped you twice. First when he aided you during the fight, second when he let you off. If you do face him in battle, do you have the resolve to defeat him?”

There was a brief silence.

Finally, after deliberating over such a serious question, she raised her head firmly.

“I am Charlotte Belew, of the noble house of Belew, who the Queen herself bestowed the unicorn coat of arms and conferred the northern grounds to.”

There was pride in her powerful declaration.

“I will eliminate all who stand in my way, no matter who they are.”

“... No matter who they are?”

“That’s right. No matter who they are.”

She clenched her fist tightly.

“Even if I have to stain my hands with blood, there’s a dream I have to realise at all costs.”

Once more, she glanced out the window.

Dusk had descended, and the figure of Felix had already disappeared.



### Part 2

Raishin was led to a space set aside for the disciplinary committee's exclusive use.

It was an area located on the second floor of the central auditorium. There were three rooms in total, the committee head's office, a rest area, and a meeting room. Although a simple gathering of student volunteers, the disciplinary committee was an important existence charged with defending the public morals of the academy— thus they were favourably treated accordingly.

Opening the door to the office, Felix ushered them inside.

"Have a seat on the sofa. I'll prepare us some tea."

"Ah, please let Yaya handle that."

Felix turned towards Raishin, to confirm if that was really his intent.

"If she says she'll do it then let her. I can assure you she's pretty skilled."

"Alright then, please."

Handing over the tea set, he instructed Yaya where to get the hot water from. Having been praised by Raishin, Yaya was in high spirits, and she enthusiastically left the room.

Felix sat across from Raishin, a grin on his face.

"Firstly, allow me to welcome you. Can I take it that you're here because you're interested in my proposal?"

"Yes. If you're offering an entry qualification, then I can't afford to ignore your proposal."

"So in other words, my strategy was a success."

He laughed jokingly. Raishin was starting to get weary of seeing the guileless smile on his pretty face.

(This guy's true intentions are hard to read...)

While thinking he was a difficult person to deal with, Raishin prompted the conversation along.

“So, whose entry qualification are you giving me? I don't suppose it's yours?”

“If we successfully resolve the problem at hand, my entry qualification is but a small price to pay—”

A dazzling smile radiated from his face which made it seem like there were stars in the background giving off light.

Almost immediately after, the lights in the background faded as he shrugged his shoulders.

“... is something I can't say. I do have some attachment to obtaining the Wiseman's Throne.”

“Hearing that is a relief. At least I know you're being honest about it.”

“Your entry qualification will be sponsored by the Night Party's executive committee. As long as the disciplinary committee agrees to it, we can send a referral to the executive committee endorsing your participation. Although quite frankly, even without our endorsement— if you took care of this incident, you would become someone so big that the executive committee wouldn't be able to ignore your presence.”

His speech was more like a prediction. Was his request something that bothersome? This was becoming increasingly suspicious, but on the other hand he was growing more interested, and so he asked.

“What would I have to do?”

“We want you to defeat a puppeteer.”

It was an anticlimactic answer. Or rather, more than feeling disappointed, he wondered if Felix was being serious.

Defeating a puppeteer— something like that was a given, even if it wasn’t said he was bound to do something like that anyway. Was the disciplinary committee specifically designating a target? However, with regards to the permissibility of such an action...

While he was deep in thought, Yaya came back with the tea.

Suspiciously eyeing the two of them who were deep in thought, Yaya placed the cups on the table.

Felix picked up a cup and elegantly brought it to his lips. Raishin asked impatiently,

“Who do I have to do in?”

“Cannibal Candy.”

No matter how much he tried to jog his memory, he couldn’t remember such a registration code amongst the Night Party participants.

Felix swirled his teacup, and happily spoke.

“Your automaton is skilled indeed. The tea still retains its aromatic flavour.”

“Cannibal— who’s that?”

“You know, in this academy, there are people who go missing every year.”

It didn’t feel like he was evading the question. Raishin silently waited for him to continue.

“Most quit of their own accord. The academy’s curriculum isn’t exactly a cakewalk, and people who can’t keep up with the lectures are fated to eventually fall by the wayside. Furthermore, the tuition fees here aren’t cheap. There are countless reasons to want to quit.”

“I don’t get it. If they want to quit, then they just need to submit a notice of withdrawal—”

Halfway, his mouth shut. Even Raishin knew the reason for not submitting a notice.

“Exactly, due to extenuating circumstances there are those who can’t submit a notice of withdrawal.”

As the premier institution of the magic world, the academy was exceedingly hard to get into. Those who had the brains and resources to enter on their own were fine, but those who couldn’t had to rely on a backer to get them in.

Armies from different countries, various conglomerates, religious organisations and syndicates provided the financial capital required.

Quitting school halfway was tantamount to a betrayal in the eyes of the backers.

Not only would they have to repay the loan, they would also have to pay compensation as well as a penalty fee for breach of contract—

The worst case scenario was that their lives would be forfeit.

“Those from that group who do drop out have no choice but to go underground. Some also stain their hands with crime and heretical magic. Students from the academy are in great demand— and obviously, that demand doesn’t just stop at places where the sun shines. Rather morbidly, academy students still retain their value even if they were dead.”

“Sounds about right.”

Raishin himself had been part of a clan that undertook similarly dirty work.



“However, this time around things are slightly different.”

The tone of his voice changed. Felix continued on in an unusually serious manner.

“Since last October, which was the start of the school term, there have been twenty six people missing—those numbers are a clear spike. That isn’t all though. We’ve also have had twelve cases where we’ve discovered automata which have been destroyed.”

“Destroyed?”

“Yes. If it were a simple case of running away, there would be no need to destroy their own automata.”

An automaton was a puppeteer’s treasure. Not only was it the tool of the trade, if there was no need for it any longer they could sell it.

There was no reason to destroy it.

If that was the case, then—

“Someone’s attacking them—”

“There is a high chance that is the case.”

“Wait a minute... you’ve been letting him get away with it till now?”

“Obviously, we haven’t been standing around and doing nothing. These few months, we’ve enlisted the help of the campus security and increased the number of patrols. Of course, we’ve been hunting for him on our own as well.”

“And the results?”

“Absolutely nothing. We did get statements from eyewitnesses, but there were too many exaggerated parts, and it’s become an urban legend of sorts among town. It’s like the second coming of Jack the Ripper. To be exact though, what the academy calls Cannibal Candy has a distinct craving for automata.”

“Craving... you say?”

Yaya’s body stiffened visibly. For a female automaton, the idea of being caught and eaten had a certain nuance to it that made it creepy.

Felix put his cup down, and spoke with his normal smile back on his face.

“Now then, I’m sure you understand what I’m trying to say. Cannibal Candy is a serious threat to the academy— it’s someone we have to defeat no matter what... an opponent that would raise your profile if you were to defeat.”

“Why are you asking me to do it?”

“There are two reasons. Firstly, there’s no way you can be Cannibal Candy.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“All students and professors are possible suspects. Even me. But you’re different. You’ve barely been in this academy for a few days.”

“And the second reason?”

“You’re strong enough.”

It was a statement made without any flattery behind it. He said it with real earnestness.

“The enemy’s strength is equivalent to a member of the Rounds. Sending someone ordinary to hunt would only result in the predator becoming the prey.”

“Why should I take your words at face value? I am Second Last after all.”

“You like to sell yourself short, don’t you?”

Felix chuckled wryly.

“Even with the numerical disadvantage, you were able to send several students packing. Did you know this? The students you beat were all approaching the top hundred places. We call them the Benchwarmers. Their actual strength isn’t something to sneeze at.”

“But the difference between the Rounds and those lot is like the distance between heaven and earth. I’m aiming for the Wiseman’s Throne— winning against them has no meaning. Besides—”

Raishin’s lips twisted as he spoke sarcastically.

“What you’re really trying to say is ‘I’ll give you a qualification so stop going around creating more disturbances’, isn’t it?”

“Correct.”

Felix didn’t even flinch.

“Unless you destroy school property, or harm a bystander, we can’t take action against students’ personal battles— although having said that, from the perspective of someone who has an obligation to protect public morals, I can’t silently stand back and watch as you test out your power on other people.”

“So you’re throwing outbait to domesticate the wild animal.”

“I prefer to call it fair trade. This won’t disadvantage you in any way after all.”

This time, it was Raishin’s turn to chuckle wryly.

In order to reign in his destructive behaviour, they chose to send him to face Cannibal Candy. If Raishin won, then things would end well. And if he lost, then there would be no loss to public morals. In the end, Felix was the sole winner.

“Up to this point, do you have any questions?”

“The Night Party has a hundred participants. If I were to gain an entry qualification—”

“Obviously, someone will have to be kicked out. However—”

Felix still had a smile on his face, but he spoke like he was casually discarding someone.

“In the two hundred years that the Night Party has been held, there has never been an instance where the 99<sup>th</sup> or 100<sup>th</sup> seat became the Wiseman. Even if you did force someone out, it wouldn’t affect that many people.”

He was more— no, exactly as cool-headed as Raishin thought.

Because of that, Raishin felt that he could trust him.

Unexpectedly, playing along wouldn’t be a bad idea... just as he thought that,

“Felix!”

Without even a knock, someone burst into the office.

With shoulder length hair that swayed dynamically, it was an intelligent looking girl with glasses. She had an aristocratic air, and looked like she had had a fine upbringing. However comparing her to Charl or Felix, there was no denying that she looked a little plain. She had an armband with the words Censor, and a white glove that signified participation in the Night Party.

In that instant, Raishin’s five senses screamed that there was something weird about her.

However, before he could even confirm that his senses were tingling, the weird feeling vanished.

Noticing that there was a visitor, the girl came to a halt in surprise. Her stiff movements made her seem like a doll.

“Let me introduce you, Raishin. This is Liz. She’s basically my reliable watchdog.”

Regaining her senses, the girl cleared her throat.



“Pardon my earlier rudeness. I am the chairman’s assistant, Lisette Norden.”

“Akabane Raishin.”

Felix continued on in a teasing manner,

“It’s not like you to be in such a fluster, Liz. Did Cannibal Candy appear or something?”

“Yes.”

Responding to his joke with a straight face, she managed to wipe the smile off Felix’s.

Continuing on in the same serious manner, she began to give her report in an efficient manner.

“A ‘devoured’ puppet was discovered in the grove of trees behind the Technical Vocations building. It seems to have been attacked last night.”

Felix sighed, and resignedly turned towards Raishin.

“Talk about a bad time... or rather, perhaps maybe this is perfect timing?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he slapped his thighs and stood up.

“Let’s go, Raishin. Time to go look at some leftovers.”

### Part 3

The first person to notice the figure was Yaya.

They were walking along a small path that led to the technical vocations building. While wordlessly walking, Yaya suddenly reacted to something, and like a cat on high alert she stared ahead of them suspiciously.

Inside the dim grove of trees, a crowd of students had started to gather. A little in front of them, a girl with a dragon atop her head was standing with a grumpy expression on her face.

“Yo, Charl, Sigmund.”

Raishin hailed them in a friendly voice...however, the reserved glances she threw in his direction went straight past him, settling on the figure of Felix who was behind.

“So, you were here as well, Charl.”

“There was a commotion going on, so...”

Charl answered while looking downwards.

Don’t just ignore me, thought Raishin. But he wasn’t childish enough to verbalise the thought.

Felix was his usual self, an amicable smile surfacing onto his face.

“Full of burning curiosity, as always. Or should I just say you have extraordinarily sharp ears?”

“I-it’s not like that’s something unusual. Cannibal Candy attacks people indiscriminately— even someone like me is at risk. It’s not something I can dismiss as someone else’s problem.”

“Haha, I guess you’re right. I apologise if I offended you.”

Felix slipped past Charl, and entered into the grove of trees with Liz in tow. Hailing the disciplinary committee members on watch, he entered into the grove.

Charl appeared to be down-hearted after Felix left. It looked like she was regretting they had part on a sour note.

Seeing her attitude, even someone as disinterested in love as Raishin could tell instinctively.

“You like him, don’t you?”

“Wha— I— You—”

She turned so red it was almost pitiful.

Ah, she’s blushing.

So even she can make that sort of face, thought Raishin as he indulged himself in that train of thought.

Charl grabbed him by the neck and hissed angrily in his ear, like she was about to bite it off.

“Don’t speak of it so casually! This isn’t something like that vulgar emotion!”

“There’s nothing vulgar about it. Falling head over heels for someone is a natural phenomenon.”

“I told you to be quiet! Or do you want me to tear open a new hole in your chest?!”

“This way, Raishin.”

Felix waved to him from the opposite side of the crowd. Charl hurriedly withdrew her hands, covering her actions with an insincere laugh. Raishin decided not to

comment, and walked towards Felix with Yaya in tow, whose mood had suddenly gotten a lot better.

A little way into the grove, a rope had been hung with the words 'Keep Out' written on it. The disciplinary committee members had gathered in front, standing guard to prevent curious onlookers from disturbing the scene.

This is almost like a murder case, thought Raishin to himself as he stepped under the rope. That thought wasn't entirely wrong, because what was laid out in front of him was—

A dead body. For all intents and purposes.

Charl let out a little groan. Raishin frowned reflexively.

The top half of the body had been separated from the bottom.

The abdominal cavity could be seen from the one half of the body. Because various internal mechanisms had been constructed and housed within, it was like looking at a human's insides. Looking at the various gears and cords spilling out of the body was more unsettling than if it had been a real human.

The bottom half of its face had been smashed in, retaining none of its original shape. Something akin to blood had been scattered around the body, making it look like some creature had feasted on it.

The most conspicuous detail that caught the eye however, was the curious wound.

A neat circle had been carved into the place where the heart should have been.

The scar was impossibly smooth and glassy, like it was candy that had dissolved through licking.

(I see, so that's where the Candy part of the name comes from...)



Cannibal for the eating of others, and Candy because of the scar. Combining the two words, it was the perfect way to express its peculiar traits in a single phrase.

Raishin brought his fist to his jaw, deep in thought.

He had seen a similar scar before in a different place.

(It couldn't be, but...)

Briefing glancing over at Yaya, he saw that she was staring down at the corpse, her face slightly pale. — It looked like she was a little frightened.

Raishin turned his gaze back to Felix, seeking a confirmation as to what he had noticed.

“The magic circuit's gone, isn't it?”

“That's his M.O. So far, all his victims have had their heart— a certain part of the magic circuit removed without fail.”

“Let me guess, when you say remove you mean they've all been eaten right?”

“We still don't know whether that is the case. No one has actually caught him in the act of eating at the scene.”

An automaton's ego was born from Eve's Heart. As long as the Eve's Heart was unharmed, the automaton could be rebuilt. Not to mention there were self-repairing automatons as well. If you looked at it the other way, then it meant that even if the Eve's Heart itself was the only thing destroyed, it was effectively a death strike for the automata.

“Whose puppet is this? What happened to the puppeteer?”

The one who answered wasn't Felix, but Lisette.

“We’re still in the process of identifying the owner. However, based off what we know of the situation so far I believe that this automaton is a morning star wielder— the one whom you fought and defeated yesterday.

She’s was probably right. The broken automaton’s feet had been crushed by a familiar looking iron ball.

However— wasn’t that a little strange?

“Hey, Charl. What do you think—”

Her lips were pursed, her shoulders were shaking, and she was staring off into space.

“What’s wrong with you?”

Without answering him she turned on her heel, like she was about to go off somewhere.

She was acting strange. Raishin grabbed onto her arm, to try and stop her.

“Hey. Wait.”

“Let go. Unhand me this instant!”

“You’re planning something weird, aren’t you? Look, acting recklessly now will get you nowhere.”

“Sigmund!”

There was a transmission of magic energy. The little dragon bared his fangs and bit Raishin’s hand.

“Owwwwwwwww!”

Yaya hurriedly dashed over to him, grabbing hold of his hand tightly.

“Show me the wound Raishin! I think it’s bleeding!”

“You just want to lick it! Go stand over there!”

While the two of them continued their slapstick routine, Charl had disappeared.

“... She’s gone.”

“She’s as impulsive as she looks. Being forced to show restraint irritates her.”

Felix intervened.

“Similarly, my blood is boiling over this as well.”

Although he was smiling as he always did— his eyes had a steely light to them.

“Will you not lend me your power, Raishin?”

He stared at Raishin. His eyes were usually half closed, but now they were opened wide. Raishin noticed for the first time that Felix’s eyes were pale blue.

“I don’t think my strength is so powerful that I can lend it to others...”

Raishin looked troubled then he gave a self-depreciating laugh.

“But given my circumstances, I do need that entry qualification.”

“That means...?”

“Let me think about it for a while.”

“Of course. If we’re going to work together I’d rather you do it of your own volition.”

It was akin to a confident prediction. Quite possibly, Felix had been manoeuvring behind Raishin’s back and was holding back information or understood something he didn’t.

“We’ll call it a day here then. I have other matters to attend to.”

With an ‘I’m looking forward to your favourable reply’, Felix returned back to the scene of the crime. The academy was autonomous to a large degree, but it still was subject to police authority. However, as long as the crime was not as serious as murder, the town police wouldn’t interfere. In lieu of that, the disciplinary committee shouldered the burden of policing the academy.

Even if he were to disturb them now, nothing useful would come from it. Raishin decided to go back to the dormitory instead.

With Yaya behind him, he made his way out of the crowd of onlookers.

Leaving the grove, he started walking back along the small path, when suddenly,

“Wait a minute, Raishin Akabane.”

Someone called out to him from behind. It wasn’t Felix, but rather, his assistant Lisette.

Stiffly bringing her face close to his, she whispered into his ear.

“I have something I wish to speak with you about.”

“Is it something confidential?”

“Yes. It’s not something I can discuss openly.”

“Does it have something to do with intimate relations with opposite genders?”

“Please sleep talk only when you’re dead. Ah, I made a mistake. What I was trying to say was—Please die.”

“Where exactly is the mistake in that?”

“Raishin...! You get turned on from being insulted...?!”

“And now you’re making mistakes on various fundamental levels, Yaya.”

Raishin stared at Lisette with a critical eye.

Observing her slender frame and intelligent face, he finally spoke.

“Yaya, go back first.”

“—No! Yaya will go along as well!”

“Don’t worry, just go back to the dorm. It won’t be good if we can’t have a quick discussion, right?”

His tone implied that there was something he wanted her to do. Picking up on it, Yaya grudgingly nodded.

“... I understand.”

Yaya’s eyes lost their light. In a monotonous voice, she carried on speaking.

“Come back as soon as you can... Before the dorm turns into rubble...”

“I’m forbidding you to do so, ok? Don’t turn it into rubble or ruins, got that?”

After watching her trudge off, Raishin turned back to face Lisette.

“Alright then, let’s hear it. This big secret of yours.”

Nodding her head in assent, Lisette took the lead and started to walk ahead of him.



### Part 4

By the time Raishin got back to the dormitory, an hour had passed.

“I’m back. Is the room still in one piece, Yaya?”

Gingerly entering the room, Yaya came flying at him in tears.

Suddenly going into a crouch, she clung tightly to Raishin’s waist.

Without giving him any say in the matter, she started to unzip his pants. Raishin hit her on the head, bringing her recklessness to an end.

“~~~~~”

“What’s up with you all of a sudden? Did some unknown error occur or something?”

Undeterred, Yaya continued on with her jet black eyes damp with tears.

“Please remove your pants, Raishin! We can talk after that!”

“Are you some kind of highway robber!? Even highway robbers say less objectionable things, you know!”

“There’s only one way to know if that vixen did something. I’ll have to confirm it by smell!”

“Like hell you will! Just how badly warped is your view of others!?”

Raishin forcefully tore Yaya, who had been stubbornly clinging on to him, away.

Yaya broke down into tears, but Raishin wasn’t in the mood to play along, and so ignored her.

“So, did you manage to discuss things with Shouko?”

“Uu, Uu...Komurasaki sent word back.”

“That was quick. And ?”

Yaya sniffled, wiping her eyes and speaking hesitantly.

“The military higher ups issued a ‘go’ order for the plan...”

To be honest, it was unexpected. Raishin fell silent.

“Raishin... are you not pleased with it?”

“I am the military’s dog. If they tell me to do it, then I have to... however...”

He looked to Yaya for confirmation.

“Can we really trust him?”

“Are you talking about Felix?”

“The whole thing is fishy. He said I’d be awarded an entry qualification— do they even have that sort of authority?”

“Well, according to what Komurasaki said...”

Yaya looked up at the ceiling, trying to remember what she had been told.

“Regarding the Kingsfort family, they have close ties to the British Intelligence Department, and are one of the influential members of the House of Lords. The head of the family is Sir Walter. After the late queen passed away he became one of the leaders of the Great British Empire from which he derives a lot of power. Even in the academy that sort of influence cannot be ignored.”

I see; they had investigated that far in such a short period of time. As expected of the military. Naturally, they had issued the ‘go’ order after careful consideration.

Besides, it was exactly as Felix had said himself. Even without the backing of the disciplinary committee, if he defeated Cannibal Candy it would raise his profile in a single stroke. Which would mean the Night Party's executive committee would not be able to ignore him.

A large body of students had gathered at the scene of the incident earlier as well. From that alone, it was clear interest was building in the incident. Felix hadn't been lying.

So in short— the problem was how he was going to go about defeating him.

Or rather, the more pressing issue was whether he could actually find Cannibal Candy in the first place.

If he wanted the finer details he'd have to ask Felix for them, but if Cannibal Candy was someone that was easily found, then the disciplinary committee members (and maybe the campus security) would have exterminated him long ago.

(Looks like I'll have to start by tracking him down... can I even make it in time before the Night Party starts?)

Lost in a sea of thought, he was drawn back to reality by a sound resembling the flapping of a wing.

A bird-like shadow landed on the window sill, and started knocking on the glass.

Restraining Yaya, who had gone into high alert, Raishin laughed as he welcome their visitor.

"Yo, Sigmund. Did Charl send you here on an errand?"

"No, I came here of my own will. I wanted to apologise for earlier."

Sigmund's eyes fell on Raishin's hand, on which the teeth marks were still vividly present.

“Don’t worry about it. I was the one who plotted to beat the two of you in the first place — hang on, if you came here to apologise, where’s Charl?”

At that moment, Charl had released magic energy. Sigmund didn’t have the intent to bite him; it was through Charl’s intent that he did so.

Sigmund lowered his small head, sighing apologetically.

“Don’t think badly of her. Normally, she’s not the sort of girl who would use Force on me.”

“She was probably worked up. Under those circumstances, even a cat or a dog would have bitten if touched.”

“A cat? That’s a perfect description of her.”

He didn’t know how to read a dragon’s expression, but he could have sworn Sigmund grinned wryly.

“Charl is...”

It was a difficult subject to talk about. Eventually, Sigmund made up his mind,

“She has some unique circumstances behind her. Occasionally, she gets oversensitive. Prone to making mistakes. And she’s never honest. However, at her core she’s kind and gentle, has an interest in handicrafts and is a harmless girl.”

Raishin doubted his ears. Handicrafts? Handicrafts meant... knitting and sewing, right?

Wow. It didn’t suit her at all.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I wonder why myself. I think I just wanted to tell you, that’s all.”

—what was that supposed to mean?

“I’ll take my leave now. See you around, Raishin.”

Sigmund kicked off from the sill. His light and easy movements made him no different from a bird. When he was in his small dragon form, it appeared that he was able to fly on his own without using any magic energy.

Watching his shadow fade into the distance, Raishin thought back to his discussion with Lisette.

“I feel a little uneasy telling you this, but—”

Earlier, inside a deserted lecture room, Lisette began to speak hesitantly.

“—please be careful of Charlotte.”

“— Why?”

“Her registration code is **Tyrant Rex**. The students call her the T-Rex— do you the know reason why?”

“Nope.”

“Originally, that name wasn’t used in reference to her; it was her automaton’s alias.”

“Sigmund?”

“That automaton is a bandoll.”

As expected, Raishin fell silent at the revelation.

Bandoll. Hearing that word always stirred up unpleasant memories inside Raishin.

“There’s a legend passed down from generation to generation in the Belew household. The first lord of the Belew house went up a dangerous mountain where he defeated and tamed the rampaging dragon, Sigmund, making it his



servant. For his success he was appointed a viscount, and since then he and his descendants have worked together with Sigmund.”

“A dangerous mountain, huh... That’s kinda typical.”

“According the legends, he ate people, burnt down towns, did every evil deed in the book. Even now, he needs to consume flesh periodically to maintain his body.”

“He eats chicken.”

Raishin had said in a small voice that could barely be heard. He was already losing interest in the conversation.

In short, everything she said was just malicious gossip. Bad rumours surrounding Charl and Sigmund.

“Bandolls are a cursed existence; in terms of their characteristics as well as the absurd situations they create.”

“That does appear to be the case.”

“Things like drinking fresh blood, eating human flesh, only being able to operate in the middle of the night— or enjoying massacres.”

“That’s quite the roundabout manner of talking. What exactly are you trying to say?”

“You still don’t get it? Has your brain been infested by maggots?”

“You’re trying to say you hate me, aren’t you? You hate me on the same level as you’d hate a hairy caterpillar?”

“We have come to the conclusion that Cannibal Candy may be a Bandoll.”

He wondered if that was really it.

For some reason or another Raishin was in an unhappy mood as he averted his eyes away from Lisette's face.

"Do you have any questions so far?"

"Yeah, I—"

A violently cold air snapped him out of his reverie.

Turning around, he noticed Yaya staring at him with eyes blacker than a solar eclipse.

"Raishin...you were thinking about that vixen, weren't you..."

"Why is your intuition only good for useless things..?"

"Well then, what are you going to do tomorrow?"

"Start the search. Now that the situation has got this far, it's time for me to start hunting Cannibal Candy."

Laughing, Raishin shook his head as he corrected himself.

"It's time for us to start hunting Cannibal Candy. That's fine, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

Yaya energetically raised her hands in support.

After that, she narrowed her eyes suspiciously,

"It couldn't be... are you aiming for that vixen!?"

"She really is someone who doesn't know how to relax."

"You have to remove your pants after all!"

Carefully maintaining the distance between the both of them, the two ended up in a stalemate like they were a snake and a mongoose facing off.

It looked like tonight was going to be another sleepless night as well.

### Part 5

It was nine at night. Inside the disciplinary committee chairman's office, Felix had spread several documents across the table, and was writing something with an unusually serious face.

Someone knocked on the door twice.

"Come in."

The person who entered was Lisette. Felix grinned at her.

"Thanks for all your hard work, Liz. Do you have some business with me?"

"Raishin Akabane has contacted us to inform us that he has officially accepted our request."

"That's good. In that case, hand this to him tomorrow."

He passed her the document he had just finished writing.

"What is it?"

"It's a contract. A matter of this importance has to be handled thoroughly and properly."

Lisette eyes widened in surprise. Browsing through the document handed to her, she saw that the contents were the same as what she had discussed with him earlier. If he defeated Cannibal Candy, then the disciplinary committee would back his push for a spot in the Night Party.

"Did you already know that he was going to accept?"

"He had no choice but to accept. At the very least, I planned it such that he would want to accept the request."

Felix answered, his face showing that it wasn't strange for Raishin to accept.

"Besides, since it was him, I had faith he would accept it. We're truly lucky that he came to us at this time—it's almost like it's heaven's providence."

"Did you know about him beforehand?"

"No, this was the first time we've ever met. However, I did have some background knowledge."

Turning around in his chair, he looked outside the window.

"Did you know something interesting, Liz? The day he transferred to this academy, there was an accident involving the railroad in the city."

"Accident? Ah— you're referring to the derailment, aren't you?"

"It was a small, throwaway article. Because there were only twenty people with minor injuries, there was nothing to write about."

He was talking in a roundabout manner. But even so, Lisette could already guess what he was going to say.

"Could it be that he was on that train...?"

"Yes. He was on board it. It's also possible that he was the main target of the derailment as well."

Chalking it up to simple coincidence was too good to be true. In fact, it was more than lucky that he was on board.

"However, that isn't the problem. What do you think he did during the accident?"

"... What did he do?"

"He stopped the runaway train. With his automaton."



“—”

“For those about to take part in the Night Party, their automaton is their one and only treasure. Truthfully, the ideal scenario is to not let it suffer even a single scratch.”

A train was essentially a massive lump of matter. If an automaton was run over by one, it would be smashed to pieces.

“However, he was different. Defying the risk of his automaton being destroyed, he stopped the runaway train— saving the lives of many passengers. He did so even though he could have just chosen to escape with his automata alone.”

Felix’s smiling face turned gentle for a second.

“I thought to myself, that guy would lend me his strength.”

For a moment, a complicated look appeared on Lisette’s face, but Felix didn’t notice it.

Leaving his chair, he walked over to the window, staring out into the darkness of the night.

“We will defeat Cannibal Candy without fail. Before the Night Party starts, we will exterminate him from this academy, no matter what underhanded tactics we have to use.”

He gazed upon the veil of darkness that had descended upon the world outside.

Tonight, that dreadful beast would come out to play once again.

### Part 6

The next morning, Raishin was sniffing in bed when he was awoken by the sound of porcelain breaking.

“Yaya? What are you doing this early in the morning..?”

Slowly getting up, he moved towards the direction of the sound.

Yaya was standing at the entrance to the room. She had a glass cup in her hand, and pieces of a water jug were strewn at her feet.

Standing in front of Yaya was a girl with a dragon atop her head.

Raishin rubbed his eyes reflexively. However, it didn’t seem like this was a dream or an illusion.

“What are you doing here? This is a boy’s dorm, you know?”

“I know. Don’t interrupt me needlessly.”

“Alright. So what do you want?”

Charl gulped, and started acting suspiciously.

She glanced to her right, then left, and then right again.

Taking deep breaths to steel herself, she finally managed to spit it out.

“Will you...”

“Will I?”

“Will you... go out on a date with me?”

In that moment, Yaya crushed the cup she was holding in her hand.

## **Chapter 4**

### **A Fictitious Dinner**

#### **Part 1**

“Will you... go out on a date with me?”

Was what Charl had said. With flushed cheeks and an upward glance.

Thinking he had heard wrongly— wishing he had heard wrongly— Raishin confirmed her request.

“—Huh?”

Whether it was an attempt to hide her blush, Charl indignantly spoke,

“Is your head as bad as your face? I asked you to go out on a date with me.”

Having received a considerable verbal attack, Raishin felt dazed.

Trying to comprehend what she had just said was like trying to catch a slippery eel.

“After school today, clear your schedule. Got that?”

The first to react was Yaya. While turning pale and started trembling all over,

“W... w... while he appreciates the fact you came all this way to invite him, Raishin already has plans after school. He doesn’t have the time to go out with you.”

“It’s fine. I’ll make room in my schedule.”

Yaya ground the fragments of the broken cup in her hand into smaller pieces.

“W-well then, I should go. I’ll see you later at the lecture hall.”



With the innocence and awkwardness of two people who had just started dating, she hurriedly left.

Watching her awkward figure retreat, Raishin let out a yawn.

“What’s up with her? Giving me the creeps this early in the morning—”

A violent chill suddenly passed through him.

For a brief moment he had a hallucination that the grim reaper was about to separate his head from his body with his scythe. Timidly turning around, he saw Yaya’s hair rising into the air, wriggling like she was medusa.

“W-wait a minute... calm down, ok? Just take a deep breath and count to the biggest prime number you can think of... please?”

A second later, a wail of agony echoed throughout the Tortoise dormitory.

“You really are a boisterous man. Is your brain infested with roundworms?”

Being strangled, just before his vision turned completely dark, Raishin’s consciousness was jolted back by the sound of a familiar voice insulting him.

Perhaps she came to her senses, or the appearance of someone else startled her, but Yaya let go of Raishin’s windpipe.

Oxygen rushing into his starved lungs, Raishin turned to face the owner of the voice.

Standing there was a bespectacled female student— Lisette. Accompanying her was a beautiful boarding mistress. Unlike Charl who had audaciously walked in, Lisette had obtained permission to visit the male dormitory.

Without even so much as a smile, Lisette handed him a large envelope with a businesslike attitude.

“What is this?”



“Is it not obvious if you think about it? Or has your brain been completely eaten by roundworms?”

“Why are you so fixated with roundworms?”

Lisette threw him a look of disdain, before reverting back to her businesslike manner.

“The contract between you and the disciplinary committee— also, all the material we have on Cannibal Candy.”

### Part 2

It was half past three. It was a little before classes were scheduled to end.

Although he still had a lecture remaining, he had skipped out of class at Charl's insistence.

Seeing him covered in fresh bruises, he had seemingly gotten out of nowhere, Charl eyed him suspiciously.

"Why are you all beat up? Did you have a scuffle with a lion or something?"

"Don't worry about it. It's just Diana<sup>1</sup> being jealous."

"Such an incomprehensible man."

'You're the incomprehensible one,' he thought. Thanks to Charl's whim, Yaya was clearly in a bad mood. Even now her pupils were unnaturally wide, and as dark as a bottomless lake.

"Well whatever. Come with me."

Charl lead the way, walking out of the lecture hall. As usual, Sigmund was riding atop her hat. Wagging his tail left and right, it made him look oddly adorable.

After exiting, Charl continued walking without stopping for a break. Leaving the main street, they searched behind the technical vocations building, inside the grove, and in the backyard.

No matter where they searched, the only constant was more walking. Even though they chose paths with no signs of anyone traversing them, they found nothing.

All too quickly, two unproductive hours passed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Diana is written with the kanji for Moon Goddess, in reference to Yaya being the Moon part of the Setsugetsuka series.

Street lights in the vicinity had been lit, and the setting sun had disappeared behind the walls.

With Yaya releasing killing intent, the situation was becoming unsettling.

Charl looked like she wasn't going to give up yet. Arriving at a deserted path where the remnants of an automaton had been discovered the night before, she gave him an order that reeked of false pride behind it.

"Raishin, walk back and forth along this path ten— no, twenty times."

"... Is this some sort of charm?"

"Don't be absurd. It's obvious you're going to be a decoy."

Her answer was as he expected. Fed up, Raishin let out a sigh.

"Even if Cannibal Candy does appear, it'll be ok since I'll defeat it. So just relax and let yourself be attacked. Now go!"

"I refuse. Besides, Cannibal Candy only comes out in the middle of the night."

"—Where did you hear that from?"

The source was the disciplinary committee. Yaya had translated the documents that Lisette had passed to him, and that was how Raishin had come into possession of that particular bit of information.

According to the documents, Cannibal Candy was only active from midnight till dawn.

Furthermore, he had never attacked automatons two days in succession before.

In other words, whatever Charl was planning to do was practically useless.

"That's just what the normal people believe. It's because of that biased way of thinking that the disciplinary committee and security haven't been able to

produce results. It's not necessarily true that he won't start attacking in successive days, or not appear at this time."

"... That's another way of looking at it, I guess."

Raishin scratched his head, deeply troubled. Charl was extremely fired up about this. At this rate, she would force him to search with her till the next morning.

It looked like he wasn't going to be able to make her give up. Devising a plan, he decided to approach the problem from a different angle.

"By the way, didn't you say we were going out on a date?"

Charl stared at him blankly,

"Aren't we on it right now?"

"Don't be stupid. There's no way something like this can be considered a date."

"S-stupid? You called me stupid? When you point fingers at someone, four of them point back at you!"

"I get it. Simply put, you don't have any friends, do you?"

"What— I— you—"

"You've barely made my acquaintance, and yet you have no one else you can go to for help so you had to ask me."

He hit the nail on its head. Ever so slightly, tears formed in Charl's eyes.

"Don't act so smug. I don't need to take your know-it-all attitude, you pervert!"

"Let's go on a date— tricking me into wasting time and energy with such sweet words, forcing me to walk such a great distance I almost crossed the Sanzu River, and denouncing me as a pervert. You really are a piece of work for a lady."

“I was only trying to help you. It’s my way of showing thanks, accusing me of other stuff is uncalled for.”

“Huh, so you knew about me taking Felix up on his offer?”

She fell silent. It appeared she did know. She had probably overheard it from somewhere or another.

If that was the case, then—

Raishin stole a glance at Yaya. To be honest, he was reluctant to do what he was about to...

“That’s enough of playing detective. It’s time to properly start the date.”

Charl stiffened up upon hearing Raishin’s words. Yaya froze as well.

“Don’t speak such nonsense so freely. I’m a busy person, and I don’t have the time to play around with you.”

“Weren’t you the one who said ‘Let’s go on a date.’? Or is the Belew household a family that reneges on their words?”

He hit her where it hurt. Charl’s shoulders shook with vexation.

“F... fine. Let’s go somewhere then.”

“Good. In that case, let’s go into the city.”

“The city— you mean outside the academy...?”

“Obviously. Since the sun has already set, there’s nothing to do inside the academy.”

A panicked look crept into her eyes. Suddenly becoming very hesitant, she looked down at her feet.



“But if we go into the city, then Sigmund...”

“You idiot. Since we’re going on a date, our automatons won’t accompany us.”

“Uu...Sigmund, say something!”

“Hm. I’m not that thoughtless.”

Spreading his four wings, he flew up from Charl’s head.

“This is a good chance. Enjoy yourself.”

“You traitor!”

It felt like he’d received her guardian’s consent; Raishin forcibly grabbed hold of Charl’s hand, pulling her along as they walked out of the academy.

### Part 3

Yaya's face turned a ghastly shade of white as she watched the two of them depart with their hands intertwined.

The tree she was leaning on let out a creak. The next moment, she had crushed the tree like it was made of tofu, splitting it into two.

Staggering like a zombie, she made her way towards the gate.

"Wait, Yaya."

Biting on to her black hair, Sigmund yanked her back.

"Let go. Let go of me!"

"Did you forget? Automaton from the academy cannot venture out into the city."

He nodded his head in the direction of the prison-like gates.

"Look. Campus security is already starting to target you."

Like he said, there were things gleaming within the eye ports.

It was the cold flash of steel. It was obvious they had already trained their sights on her.

"I've heard the campus security here has some graduates on their payroll. So not only would you have to contend with rifles, you would also be up against puppeteers. I can guarantee you'll end up being destroyed."

"But..."

"Think carefully. If you kick up a fuss here, it will only cause problems for your master."

It was a blow more effective than an actual bullet.

Yaya flinched, sinking to the floor.

With both hands covering her eyes, she began to weep.

“Don’t cry. Why don’t you have a little more faith in your master?”

“Uu...faith...?”

“I have lived for close to 150 years now. I have observed many men in that time, and I can tell you there was no sign of lust in his eyes. He isn’t going after Charl.”

“...Really?”

“Although, men of that age are usually pretty promiscuous— that is a fact of life.”

Yaya began to cry again. Strangely, her tears seemed to crystallise in a blink of an eye, falling to the earth with a clink.

“Oh boy... the way you’re acting up means this matter is on an entirely different level from simple fidelity to you, huh?”

Sigmund was dumbfounded. Landing in front of her, he started to talk like he was lecturing a novice.

“We are different from humans. Even if you look the same, have the same functions, have as little difference to them as possible— it doesn’t change the fact that you will never be human.”

“Yaya... already knows that...”

“Automaton run on a magic energy supplied to them from their controllers. You could say the relationship between them is like a mother and child. It’s extremely natural for automata to grow fond of their owners... but I think you’re taking it too far. Why are you so persistent when it comes to him?”

“That’s... well...i-it’s s-something I can’t speak about.”

Fidgeting in embarrassment, she started tracing circles in the ground. That action was extremely human-like.

“Does it have something to with his goal?”

“That’s...”

“Who is he exactly? Why is he so fixated on the Night Party?”

“Well...”

“Attacking us wasn’t his true intention. But if he was willing to go that far, it means there has to be a reason why he’s obsessed with the Night Party. What is it? It doesn’t seem like he’s motivated by ambition or self-interest.”

‘I can’t go into details, but...”

She hesitated for a second. Then she solemnly muttered.

“Raishin is out for revenge.”

“Hmm...at any rate, the both of us are currently without our masters.”

Flapping his wings, Sigmund landed atop Yaya’s head.

“That means we have to watch out for Cannibal Candy, or else—“

“Eh—“

As the darkness of night around them suddenly grew deeper, Sigmund’s eyes lit up like a cat’s.

### Part 4

“As expected of the Machine City. Even at this hour, shops are still open for business.”

Walking along the lit streets, Raishin spoke cheerfully.

The sun had already set, but the streets were still bustling with life. The streets were still filled with human traffic, and stores and restaurants were still crowded with customers. There were shoe stores, clothing outlets, jewellery stores, stores that sold mechanical parts and items used in magic arts, as well as shops that handled automata.

“Hey, you two students! Come on in!” “I’ll give you guys a discount!”

They were assailed on both sides by the voices of the shopkeepers. Raishin chuckled,

“Wow, they’re friendly to Orientals as well.”

“That’s only because you’re wearing the academy uniform.”

Charl, who had been in a bad mood ever since he dragged her out, gave him a stinging rebuttal.

“Exchange students are rich. They’re VIPs in the shopkeepers’ eyes.”

“I don’t exactly hate that. At least, it’s a more believable explanation than compassion or charity.”

“Hmph...that’s a rather cutthroat outlook.”

“I’m a realist, you know.”

Suddenly, Charl ducked her head and stealthily hid behind him.



Walking towards them was a red faced man.

While he looked a little inebriated, it wasn't like he was drunk out of his mind.

"... What's wrong?"

"I-it's nothing."

Although having said that, it was clear she was anything but calm.

Abruptly, a bunch of kids laughed behind them, and Charl jumped at the sound.

Raishin stopped, comparing Charl with the hustle and bustle of the city.

"Haaaa."

"W-what's that haaaa supposed to mean? Don't look so smug."

"In short, you're feeling helpless because Sigmund's not around."

He hit the mark again. Charl suddenly fell silent.

"That's normal for puppeteers. But don't worry. You've already seen how strong I am, right?"

"That's why I'm worried. There's no guarantee you won't try to make a pass at me later when sending me back."

"You really don't trust me at all, do you? Well, I guess I reap what I sow."

With a wry laugh, he started walking again. Charl hurriedly chased after him. If anything, she reminded him of a puppy that didn't like to be left behind, and he laughed at the thought.

"D-don't just go off like that. Where are you planning on going anyway?"

“I was thinking of walking along the waterways. Yaya was making a fuss about how the night scenery is supposedly very beautiful.”

“...Hmph, that is so clichéd. If that’s the best you can come up with, let’s just go back. I’m starting to get hungry.”

“Alright. If that’s the case, let’s go grab a bite.”

“So we’re going back to the dormitories?”

“Don’t be such a wet blanket. Let’s find a place with a good atmosphere and eat there.”

“N-no way!”

It was a strong refusal, but almost immediately she snapped her mouth shut, mumbling something.

“This month... I seem to be in a state of economic distress... that is, I’m having financial difficulties...”

“If you’re worried about money it’s fine. I brought out my wallet today, so I can treat you.”

“Eh—<3”

Charl’s eyes sparkled.

An instant later, she had snapped out of it, turning her head away with a ‘hmph!’

“I refuse to accept charity from a pervert like you.”

However— her stomach betrayed what she was saying, asserting its opinion by rumbling loudly.

Charl turned visibly red, and started smacking Raishin.

“Insolent buffoon~!”

“... Eh, me? How is this my fault?”

“For me to be embarrassed like this...unforgivable!”

Finally, with a hint of desperation and some tears in her eyes, Charl declared loudly.

“Fine. I get it. I’ll have you treat me completely and thoroughly.”

Twenty minutes later, the two of them were in a restaurant along the waterway.

They were seated on the balcony of the second floor.

The light reflected off the waterway could be seen clearly. The building’s interior was a modern design combining steel frames and brick, giving it a good impression without being too pretentious.

For appetizers, they had uncured ham mariné<sup>1</sup>. While Charl chewed on her food, she stared at Raishin’s hands as if she was seeing something curious.

“I’ve heard that the Japanese have terrible table manners— surprisingly, you’re very normal.”

“For your information, using chopsticks is way harder than using a fork.”

“You drink your soup by bring the bowl to your lips and sipping? That’s so noisy.”

“There’s nothing wrong with slurping miso soup, it’s just a different culture. Don’t speak ill of another country’s customs.”

With some light banter, but nothing particularly malicious, the dinner continued.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://recipe.rakuten.co.jp/recipe/1670006693/>

Next, a clear soup with a strong smell was brought to them. Raishin found the taste too strong for his liking, but Charl seemed to like it, cheerfully going “There there, it’s not for everyone.”

While waiting for the meat dish, their eyes met.

She was staring at him like she wanted to say something.

“What’s up?”

“Nothing.”

“You should be more honest. Please feel free to speak your mind, my lady.”

He jokingly used polite speech. He thought that would finally get her to talk... although that wasn’t the case. Charl hesitantly opened her mouth,

“Why did you ask me out?”

“You were the one who asked me out.”

“No. I’m not talking about this... it’s about yesterday, during lunch.”

She averted her eyes. The tip of her nose turned faintly pink, something he thought was surprisingly cute.

While a bit taken aback by the question, Raishin managed to answer.

“Why, you ask— I suppose I was just going with the flow.”

“Going with the flow? What a foolish answer.”

Contrary to being discontent with his answer, Charl gave a little laugh, not as dissatisfied as he thought she would be.

“You really are a reckless person. Not only did you challenge me, the T-Rex, to a fight, you actually had the guts to then ask to have lunch with me. You really are an idiot beyond saving.”

“I thank you for your words of praise.”

“I have a question for the idiot.”

“Ask away, my lady.”

“Why did you target my entry qualification?”

At that point, the waiter brought them their meal. It was veal; just by looking at it they could sense the tenderness. It had been grilled to a beautiful colour, and the fragrant sauce alone whetted their appetites.

After the waiter had placed their plates on the table, Charl waited for him to leave before continuing.

“There are a hundred entrants in the Night Party. There should have been easier opponents for you to target.”

“...if it were someone I could defeat easily, there would be no point.”

“To make the Night Party executive committee take notice of you?”

“No...well, I guess there was that too, but that wasn't it.”

Knife in hand, he searched for the right words. He wasn't good at explaining things.

Just like Charl had said, while trying to appeal to the executive committee, defeating a strong opponent would have a greater effect.

Even if he did win his fight, there was no guarantee that he could obtain an entry qualification that way. Beating up countless Benchwarmers to get into the Night Party... if he had done it that way, he would have failed.



However, Raishin's reason for seeking out a stronger enemy wasn't just because of that.

"I thought to myself, I'm going to defeat someone and rise up the rankings to take his place. For me to arrive out of the blue and get an entry qualification through brute force seems somehow wrong. So I felt like I had to take some sort of risk, or it would be unfair...well, I mean, either way it would still be unfair."

Raishin struggled to express himself properly—in the end, he gave up.

"Sorry. I guess I myself also don't really understand why I did it. By the way, this is delicious."

"... I thought you were someone who was hard to read, someone whose thoughts I couldn't get a hold off."

Her eyes half opened, Charl spoke in an astounded tone.

"But it looks like you weren't even thinking. Your thoughts were just flapping about in the wind like a piece of laundry. There's no way I could have read a person like that."

"That's about right. Is that all you want to ask?"

"One more question. What's with your style of fighting? It's my first time seeing someone fight alongside his puppet."

"Ah... That's something like a cunning trick."

"Cunning?"

"Originally, I was brought up in a house of war. My clan is... was skilled in fighting as a group."

Charl's fork suddenly stopped. Something had caught her attention.

“Controlling a military unit— that was the hallmark of the Akabane clan puppeteers.”

At that moment, the look on Charl’s face changed. She had realised something.

In the academy, there was one person who was skilled in group warfare. The strongest puppeteer, who wielded six female type automata simultaneously.

However, Charl didn’t say anything. Bringing a piece of veal into her mouth, she silently waited for him to continue.

Appreciating her consideration, Raishin continued on.

“Well, they also had someone as talentless as me inside. Just controlling Yaya alone is already a heavy burden for me. Therefore, in place of a puppet I substitute my own body instead. Luckily, I do have some knowledge of martial arts. So instead of hastily prepared magic, I rely on my fists to fight.”

“Hastily prepared..? So, tell me, what do the Oriental spells looks like?”

“We don’t use spells or invocations. Suimei, Shinkan, Kouen, Tenken— to put it frankly, the Fuurinkazan<sup>2</sup>. Rudimentary battle concepts in word form. In my clan’s case, you can think of it as a... code. By using them I can adjust the nature of the magic energy, the output, the type of magic art and the formation I’m transmitting to Yaya.

‘You verbalise your commands? That sounds like something only a beginner would do.’

“I AM a beginner. I’ve only seriously studied puppetry for two years.”

---

<sup>2</sup>風林火山. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C5%ABrinkazan>

Suimei=Howl

Shinkan= Silence

Kouen: Light and Flame

Tenken: Natural Defence

Each one corresponds to one element in the fuurinkazan. Suimei=wind, shinkan=forest, kouen=fire, tenken=mountain.

Charl's jaw dropped.

"I'm shocked. In that case, why do you want to be the Wiseman? If you're not even an expert in puppetry, why would you fly all the way over from the East? Why do you want the Wiseman's throne—"

Raishin raised his finger to stop her.

"I have various reasons for wanting it. Now, I think it's my turn to ask some questions."

He evaded her question. Charl had a look of blatant dislike on her face, but to refuse him wouldn't be fair, or so she thought, so she reluctantly nodded.

"What's your relationship with Felix? Where did you first meet?"

"Are you interested in him? Don't tell me, are you really a hom—"

"What did you just say? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"He called out to me from afar..."

Charl blushed slightly, and her eyes dropped.

"I was making enemies without even knowing it...no, that's fine, right? I'm more comfortable being alone, and I wasn't planning on getting friendly with future enemies. However—"

Her sapphire eyes clouded over.

"Acting alone has its good points and bad points. There were a lot of people who would get weirdly conceited once they learnt that their opponent would only be one person. Damaging my locker, or hiding my bag... really, they had too much free time on their hands. Also, they had the temerity to do stuff that normal people wouldn't."

She spoke in an annoyed tone. After that, her expression changed into a gentle smile.

“Felix was a member of the disciplinary committee, so he would look out for me.”

“I see. So that’s when you started to like him.”

“I don’t. Stop speaking such nonsense or I’ll burn you alive!”

“You actually would have preferred if it were him and not me on this date right now, don’t you?”

“Wha—I—you—”

“He did invite you out before. Why did you refuse him? Everything would have worked out as you desired.”

“... I can’t.”

Her anger disappeared. Rapidly losing her spirit, Charl looked away deflated.

Her gaze falling onto the darkness of the waterway, she spoke in a hollow voice.

“Felix has a different sort of popularity than the one you have. A lot of the female students are crazy about him. If word got out that I went on a date with him...”

“You would have needlessly increased the amount of enemies you have, huh.”

She fell silent. Not wanting to press the issue any further,

“Let’s change topics. Why do you want to become the Wiseman?”

“That has nothing to do with you.”

“It doesn’t. But I’m interested nonetheless.”

Charl thought about it for a moment, before half sighing her answer.

“I have a... dream I must fulfil.”

“A dream?”

She didn’t answer. However her lips, which were pressed tightly together, were overflowing with a sad determination. It wasn’t for fame or social status, but her determination was brighter than any fire.

It was something of great importance to Charl. She probably didn’t trust him enough to share it with him and he knew it. Raishin knew that was the end of that particular conversation.

“It looks like you have your own fair share of problems.”

“Hmph. I could say the same about you.”

Charl curtly replied— then she giggled slightly.

Maybe she found it strange, or she enjoyed herself, but she was laughing. When she laughed like that, Raishin didn’t see her as a violent problematic child, or a haughty aristocratic lady, but as a perfectly normal girl.

After treating her to three scoops of ice cream, Raishin stood up.

“Let’s go. Before we go back to the dorms, there’s something I need to buy.”

Leaving the restaurant, they walked through the city at Charl’s pace.

Window-shopping around town, they spent a long time inside a shoe shop, before heading back to the road that would bring them back to the academy since it was almost curfew time.

“Thanks for helping me decide. I have no clue when it comes to women’s clothing.”

Lightly tapping his package from the shoe shop, he gave Charl a small laugh.



“Hmph. I didn’t expect you to have such consideration for others. That’s quite surprising considering I thought you were an insensitive, selfish, rude and perverted foreign barbarian.”

That was excessively long. However, he found that he couldn’t disagree with her (save for the pervert part), so he didn’t reply.

“Or perhaps the reason why you’re fussing over her to that extent is because that girl is scary?”

“Hm... I’m not sure if scary is the right word for it... dangerous would also be appropriate...”

“Such a pathetic man. To be controlled by your automaton runs opposite to convention, don’t you think?”

Although she was insulting him, there was no real spite in her words. Charl laughed in a relaxed manner.

Eventually, as the gates of the academy came into sight, she said something unexpected.

“About our talk earlier. When you gave me your reasons for targeting me.”

“Ah... I thought I told you I didn’t get it myself.”

“I get it.”

Hearing her say something so unexpected, Raishin turned to face her without thinking.

“It may only be a little bit, but I think I understand. The feeling of wanting to be punished... That’s because I’ve committed a sin before.”

He was about to ask her what she meant by that— but then he noticed something strange happening up ahead.

“What’s wrong?”

It was past nine. Normally, by this time the academy should have been peacefully quiet.

However, there was some kind of commotion going on inside the gates.

“What’s this? Hey, wait a minute— Raishin!?”

Charl was shouting behind him. However, he didn’t stop. As swift as a gale, Raishin dashed up the path, running towards the academy at full speed.

### Part 5

Just as he had thought, there was a great commotion going on inside the academy grounds.

Even though it was already this late, the students had gathered, and were jostling one another to get a better view.

At the front of the crowd, a rope with the words 'Keep Out' had been hung, and Raishin could see the figures of the disciplinary committee members moving busily about, illuminated by their flashlights.

Spying Felix's figure in the midst of the activity, Raishin jumped the rope.

Recognising Raishin, Felix smiled up at him.

"Yo, you got here quicker than I expected."

"Save the sarcasm. What's the situation?"

"Another automaton has been done in. You want to see it?"

He nodded. Felix signalled another member on the scene to take over, and he guided Raishin inside the garden.

For a brief moment the worst case scenario flashed through Raishin's mind.

It couldn't be... There's no way that it would be...

He quickened his pace. Suppressing his urge to break into a dash, Raishin followed Felix.

Seeing through his thoughts, Felix spoke up.

"Your automaton's not with you tonight?"

“I went out into the city. I could ask you the same—”

Suddenly, a doubt crept into his mind.

“Where is your automaton anyway? Now that you mention it, I’ve never seen it before.”

“Obviously, I’ve left mine in the Locker. I am a member of the rounds, you know—with the Night Party this close, if I were to bring it out willy-nilly I’d be opening myself to attacks from ruffians like yourself.”

It was true. Charl had been attacked by a group of ten. To avoid that sort of trouble, some participants had chosen the quick and easy solution by not bringing their automata out with them.

“I see. So instead of using your own, you were planning to use mine instead.”

“Don’t say it in such a spiteful way. Well, I can’t blame you if you want to think that way. To me, you’re—”

“Raishin!”

Someone cut in from behind, leaving Felix’s words hanging in the air.

An out of breath Charl charged over to them.

“Felix—”

“Yo, Charl. Did you go out into the city with him?”

He was sharp. Even though he wasn’t rebuking her, Charl still winced.

“Wait, don’t get the wrong idea, I was just—”

“Now then, Raishin. The victim is over there.”

Felix coldly cut her off, pointing towards the shadow of a thicket.

Surrounded by a number of disciplinary committee members, a half destroyed automaton was horizontally down on the ground.

This time, the body was in one piece. The automaton was a female model. A scar indicating the heart had been ripped out was present. Shining a light on the wound, the area had been partially melted, but different from all the cases up till now, it had retained its shape considerably.

The automaton's skin was jet black— it could be concluded this was clearly nothing like Yaya's.

Looking at the automaton's head strangely caused a memory to stir.

Directly opposite him, there was a student crying while clinging on to the remains. It looked like he was mourning its death. Looking at his face, Raishin finally remembered.

He belonged to the group which had attacked Charl yesterday; the student who was controlling the Undine automaton. He wondered if this meant this was the Undine. The body's condition was very different from how he last remembered it, and it threw him off for a second.

It should have been more obvious to him, but the translucency of the body was a result of a magic art converting the body into a liquid state. By default it was a sturdier construct, as expected.

Charl briefly looked down on the student, dumbfounded.

Then with her eyes burning with a fierce fire, she spun around on her heel.

“Wait, Charl.”

With his back still turned, Felix stopped her in an unexpectedly strong tone.

“I think it would be better if you stopped involving yourself with Cannibal Candy from here on out.”

“But—!”

“Leave Cannibal Candy to the disciplinary committee. Also—”

Felix turned to face Charl.

He didn’t have his usual smile on his face, but his eyebrows were furrowed in sadness.

“I understand your feelings. It’s unfortunate, but I’ll gracefully back out.”

“Eh—”

“You’ve chosen Raishin over me— that’s what’s you have decided, am I right?”

Charl stiffened up in shock.

“No, you’ve got it all wro—...”

“... There’s still work to be done here. I’m sorry, but could I ask you to leave? Also— I don’t think we should see each other for a while.”

Dejectedly turning away, he left.

Charl turned as pale as a ghost, trembling all over.

“What... What should I do...”

“Hey, calm down.”

“Felix... hates... me...”

“Calm down. Look, it’s all just a big misunderstanding—”

“Leave me alone!”

Brushing off Raishin’s hand, she ran off like she was bullet fired from a gun.



Her slim shoulders vanished into the distance. Raishin could only stare in blank amazement at her disappearing figure. Unable to believe what he just saw, Raishin muttered to himself.

“It’s not something worth crying over, right?”

His words were carried away by the night wind, disappearing like the ocean foam.

### Part 6

Raishin returned back to his room, thoroughly unsatisfied.

“...Yaya?”

He gingerly peeked into the room. Just how badly was she sulking?

The alternative was she was angry. Either way, he wasn't looking forward to it.

However.

“Welcome back, Raishin <3”

Her feet pitter-pattered on the floor as she ran towards him, in an extremely good mood.

“I made dinner. I have confidence in my cooking tonight.”

“Uh... What are you saying...?”

Meals in the dormitory were handled by the canteen. There was no facilities or equipment for students to cook on their own.

His eye glanced over at the table— and he was startled.

“What... are you up to now?”

“What's the matter? Hurry up and have a seat.”

Yaya beamed at him, beckoning him towards the table.

There were several plates placed neatly on top of the white tablecloth.

All of them were empty.



“What’s wrong with you? Snap out of it!”

“Ufufu, there’s nothing wrong with me. Raishin, you’re being so weird.”

Although Yaya was smiling brightly at him, her eyes were hollow, devoid of light.

Raishin felt a chill creeping down his spine.

Was there a malfunction in her thinking process...!?

Not knowing what to do, Raishin pulled Yaya to him and hugged her tightly.

‘It’s my fault! I’m sorry! So please, return back to normal!’

Yaya cracked, burying her face inside Raishin’s chest—

And then she started to cry.

“Uu, Uu, Raishin is so cruel... Even though you know how Yaya feels, you still chase other women...”

“I said I’m sorry, so stop crying. Look, I got you something.”

He held out the package from the shoe shop. It was something he had bought when he was out in the city with Charl.

Yaya stared at it in surprise then, with a mixture of expectation and unease on her face, she opened the package accompanied by the rustle of paper.

It was a pair of shiny, black lace-up boots.

It was a little old-fashioned, but well-crafted and elegant.

“When you stepped on the railway tracks that time, your geta got all battered up. It’s hard for you to fight wearing them, and there is always the risk of the strap breaking. So use these for the time being.”

Raishin helped her put them on, and Yaya blissfully smiled.

“A perfect fit...<3”

She turned her feet a couple of times in happiness.

Although she was being a little too exuberant, she was back to normal. Raishin let out a sigh of relief.

“Yaya. You’ve been making a fundamental mistake in your thinking. I’m not attracted to Charl or anything, and I didn’t invite her out because I was.”

Dispelling her misunderstanding was dangerous. Raishin carefully and thoroughly explained himself in an easy to understand manner.

“In the first place, I’m not interest in little girls who have to use padding. I prefer someone like Shouko, a lady with full cleavage like the goddess of harvest.”

“How did you know her chest was fake..? Also, again with Shouko, Shouko, Shouko..!”

Noticing that Yaya looked like she was about to blow her top, Raishin hurriedly coughed and changed the subject.

“Let’s leave that aside for now. And anyway, I went out with Charl because I wanted to confirm something. It’s related to Cannibal Candy.”

Yaya picked up on something. Her eyes widening,

“Don’t tell me, you suspect Charlotte of being Cannibal Candy?”

“The torrent of light Sigmund fired out would leave behind a similar scar to Cannibal Candy’s handiwork.”

Raishin was referring to the uniquely smooth, glassy scar, which resembled someone licking a candy.

“There was a million to one chance of Cannibal Candy appearing when Charl and I left the academy.”

“If it did it would create an alibi for Charlotte, wouldn’t it?”

“That’s right. And as a matter of fact, Cannibal Candy did attack— or so it seems.”

“Then doesn’t that mean Charlotte isn’t guilty?”

“No, on the contrary it only makes things murkier.”

No matter how he looked at it, it seemed too convenient.

Up till now, Cannibal Candy had never attacked two days in a row. This time, he didn’t wait till midnight to hunt, and the wound was only half melted. Something felt off about it.

Tonight’s dinner had been fictitious— a sham, and it had deception written all over it.

Yaya didn’t seem to understand. She had a troubled look on her face as she furrowed her eyebrows together in a frown.

“But Sigmund and I were both keeping watch over the rooms the whole time. Without a puppeteer nearby, we wouldn’t be able to manifest any magic energy.”

“There is an exception to this though, bandolls.”

Bandolls were essentially living machines which housed human parts inside them. Because of that, they could supply themselves with magic energy to a certain extent.

“In that case, her alibi wouldn’t hold up...so, that means it really was a date...?”

“Don’t widen your eyes. Her absence does have meaning.”



Yaya stared at him doubtfully. However, Raishin didn't explain himself, going over the situation in his head instead.

Indeed, Charl being on a date with him did have meaning. Thanks to that, he was able to grab the enemy by the tail...or so he felt. If what he saw just now had really been the handiwork of Cannibal Candy—

Just as he was in the middle of his thoughts, he was disturbed by an unexpected knock on his door.

From the opposite side of the old door, the boarding master's voice could be heard, his voice redundantly easy on the ears.

"Raishin. You have a phone call."

Raishin left Yaya in the room and went down to the first floor lobby.

The telephone was in front of the boarding master's office. The receiver was already off its hook, and Raishin picked it up.

"I'm sorry for the late call. It's Lisette Norden."

"Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"Did you think I would call someone as sad as yourself just for fun?"

"... It would have been better if you'd started with that. So, what do you want?"

"We're searching for Charlotte."

"—What did you say?"

"She's left the Gryphon dormitory. I don't know if you know this, but Charlotte and I both reside in this dormitory."

“Are you sure she’s not there?”

“If she was, I wouldn’t be making this phone call, you dense maggot.”

“... You’re right.”

“I thought perhaps she went over to your room to indulge in illicit sexual relations.”

“Are you Yaya? Your leap of logic is spectacular. Stop jumping to hasty conclusions.”

“For you to have insulted me is such a humiliation. Do you have any idea where she might be?”

“...Nope.”

For a moment, he remembered the lone ray of light that had fallen upon her cheek.

“If you do not possess any knowledge, then you are clearly useless. Goodbye.”

There was a click. She had hung up.

Forgetting to place the receiver back, Raishin stood still for a minute.

Was Charl still planning on searching for Cannibal Candy?

Or—Was she about to do something rash?

(... No. Calm down. I can’t do anything if I’m flustered.”

If Sigmund was with her, then Charl would be able to fend off Cannibal Candy... or should be able to. Also, if Sigmund was with her, he would prevent her from doing anything foolish.

However, all this was supposing Sigmund was there. If he wasn’t—

“Dammit, such a troublesome person...”

He slammed the receiver back onto the hook, walking towards the entrance. Just as he was about to dash out of the academy— he stopped like he had been stuck by a bolt of lightning.

His eyes were focused on someone standing there.

Although he wanted to hug her, he couldn’t say that in front of her.

Her kimono was more in the style of a dress, and her ample bosom was so white it almost shone. As if she was hiding her peerless beauty, she had glasses in the form of an eyepatch over her right eye.

With a bewitching laugh, her voice was like a stringed instrument.

“Tonight’s a fine night, isn’t it boy. The moon is so beautiful.”

“Shouko—”

Raishin finally came to his senses, managing to spit out her name.

## **Chapter 5**

### **From The Beginning of The Beginning**

#### **Part 1**

Amidst the falling snow, the two stood out with their vivid colour.

A bewitchingly voluptuous woman, and a beautiful young girl.

Both were clad in beguiling kimonos. The girl was holding an umbrella, to shield the woman from the snow.

At first glance, they looked like sisters. The woman was like a gorgeous rose, and the girl like an elegant chrysanthemum— they had vastly different airs about them, but their facial features had some similarities.

“This is it, isn’t it?”

Coming to a halt in front of a certain estate, they passed through the blackened door.

It looked like there had been a fire. The estate had been completely devastated by it, leaving it a mere shadow of its former self. The smell of burnt ash permeated the place, and the ground was covered in a thin layer of soot.

In the midst of it all, there was a lone boy.

The cold in the air was enough to sting bare flesh, yet the boy had stripped to the waist, making gestures with his fingers like a mountain hermit. An ancient-looking scroll was unfurled before him as he focused his magic energy and poured it into the wooden puppet in front of him.

Shakily, like a newborn infant learning to walk for the first time, the puppet took unsteady steps forward.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---



## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

The boy was making the puppet move. His whole body was drenched in sweat. He was concentrating so hard it looked like he was about to pop a vein, but disproportionate to his efforts the wooden puppet only moved a little.

With wild, ragged breaths, he gritted his teeth hard enough to crack them as he pounded on the floor in irritation with his clenched fists.

His face looked terrible. His cheeks were hollow, and his eyes were sunken in. However his pupils shone with a fierce light, making him look very ghastly. He looked like he was on the verge of dying at any moment.

The boy looked through the scroll with bloodshot eyes, before making gestures with his hands once more. He began to store energy at a point below his navel, and then—

He spewed out blood with a terrible sounding cough.

Racked with coughs, he fell down on his back and stopped moving.

—This was a suitable time. The woman stepped out from under the umbrella the girl was holding, and walked towards the boy.

“That was quite the effort, boy.”

“... I am not ‘boy’.”

The boy replied in a hoarse voice. He was still conscious. His physical endurance was surprising.

“That’s right. You have a name, and it is Raishin.”

A wary look crept into his eyes. The woman gave a mocking laugh,

“I know a lot about you, boy. You’re the sole survivor of the Akabane clan.”

“... Who are you?”



## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“You’re not very diligent, are you boy? You were born into a house of puppeteers, and yet you don’t know who I am.”

Turning to the girl, she beckoned her over.

The girl seemed to understand what to do. Without any particular instruction from the woman, she stopped in front of the boy, turned her back to him and removed her kimono.

The boy was startled, but he no longer had the strength to cover his eyes.

The girl’s skin was exquisitely beautiful. With neither mark nor blemish on it, it was as smooth as a field of snow.

At the lower left of her beautiful back, above her hipbone, an inscription had been carved into it.

Karyuusai, it read.

That name was one that resonated throughout the world. Even the military’s top brass had acknowledged her as the eminent puppet craftsman of this generation.

So— this girl was an automaton?

The boy’s eyes opened slightly wider. He was shocked by the vibrancy of her complexion. The feel of her skin was exactly like that of a human being.

“She’s pretty, isn’t she? This is one of the Setsugetsuka trifecta, Yaya of the Moon.”

“...!?”

He had only heard of their existence before, Karyuusai’s prized treasure, the Setsugetsuka.

They had never been revealed to the world before. No matter how rich a girl was, there was no way she could have owned one.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Therefore, at this present point in time, the only one who would be in possession of a Setsugetsuka would be the creator himself.

His blood soaked face contorted as he let out a weak laugh.

“You gotta be kidding me...Karyuusai is... a heavy drinker, fond of women, and someone who wildly indulges in the pleasures of life...”

“Oh, so you do know me after all. Yes, that is all true. I do love wine, women and song.”

“That means you’re the one who... created the Imperial Guard’s...Oborofuji...”

The woman turned her head away like it was something tedious, and spoke in an oddly depressed tone.

“That thing was a failure.”

‘A failure...!? That monster.... which changed... the entire landscape of the Fuji training grounds...?’

“It wasn’t beautiful at all.”

The boy was rendered speechless. The woman carried on speaking.

“In this fleeting world however, nothing is useless— thanks to that failure, my fame has grown somewhat significantly. I guess you could call me a celebrity now. And I do have influence amongst the army higher-ups.”

She laughed violently, and stared into the boy’s eyes.

“Enough influence to grant you your wish, boy.”

“My... wish...?”

“Yes. I can help you find the person you hate so much that you want to kill him.”

“—”

“To go up against him, I’ll even lend you the world’s best automaton.”

The boy moved his pupils horizontally, his gaze falling onto the beautiful girl standing next to the woman.

If the Setsugetsuka were exactly what the rumours said they were, then it was possible—

“Say, boy. Become mine.”

It was a piercing gaze. The woman lightly and gently touched the boy’s cheek.

The boy’s body stiffened. It was like a dangerous wild beast was staring at him.

What surfaced in the boy’s eyes was the emotion felt when faced with something completely unknown; instinctive fear.

However at the same time, he was charmed by her.

The intensity of her entire existence captivated him, being both poison and antidote.

“The road lying before you forks into two paths, boy. You can either choose to freeze to death here, or you can—”

### Part 2

Raishin stared at the unexpected visitor, struck dumb by her sudden appearance.

There was no way he could be mistaken. Her bewitching beauty was exactly as it was when she first appeared in front of him two years ago. In no way inferior to the dolls she created, she was as dazzlingly beautiful as any of them. Also, the voluptuous breasts that had mesmerized Raishin were as sensual as ever.

Like that night, there was a beautiful girl accompanying her tonight as well. Her face looked like Yaya's, but she had silver hair and her eyes were more dignified. Also, she was a little taller.

"Shouko, why are you..."

She put her finger to her lips.

"Raishin. Is something wrong?"

The pretty boarding master peeked out of the office with a doubtful look on his face. Raishin thought "oh crap.", but managed to say,

"Nothing. Everything's fine."

The boarding master withdrew his head.

—She can't see them?

"Let's go to your room."

Shouko whispered into his ear. The faint smell of her jasmine fragrance caused the boarding master to frown suspiciously, but not even in his wildest dreams could he have guessed that was such a peerless beauty standing there.

A magic art to hide one's presence. That was something Yaya's sister machine, Komurasaki, was skilled at.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Having understood the situation, Raishin feigned an air of ignorance towards the boarding master as he retreated back to his room.

If he was honest though, all he wanted to do at the moment was to go search for Charl, but since Shouko had gone out of her way to come visit him, she wasn't someone he could brush off.

Returning to his room, barely had Yaya jumped up towards him when she stopped in surprise.

"Shouko!"

Shouko looked at her in the way a mother looked at her child,

"You seem energetic enough, Yaya."

"Yes. Yaya's functions are perfectly normal."

"If you're perfectly normal, why are there traces of tears on your face?"

Someone abruptly cut in. The beautiful girl walking behind Shouko reprimanded Yaya.

Yaya took a step back, her wariness on full display.

"Since when were you there, big sis Irori?"

"Oh? Are you so out of it that you cannot even count the number of visitors? Or have your eyes gone bad? Are they just there for show?"

"That was just sarcasm. Yaya is totally focused."

"With an attitude like that, surely you have been causing nothing but problems to Raishin, haven't you?"

"T-that's not true at all..."

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“So you haven’t been having wild delusions over Raishin and resenting him, burning with jealousy over your misguided suspicions, crying, losing your temper, and flying into jealous rages?”

“N-n-n-no, I h-h-haven’t...”

“Really now, you should learn from Komurasaki. She doesn’t complain about getting simple tasks, doesn’t get lost herself within delusions of love, and just works hard to fulfil her duty. In the first place, you—”

“Uuh...sis is always so mean to me...”

Ignoring the two sisters, Raishin held out a chair for Shouko and poured some tea.

“So Shouko, why are you at the academy?”

Needless to say, the academy’s security personnel were pretty strict. Sneaking in with an automaton was a dangerous gamble. Even if said sneaking in was covered by a high level magic art that killed off their presence.

“I couldn’t sit still because I was worried about you, boy.”

She flashed him a flirtatious glance. Her breasts were pressed together and the nape of her neck was tantalisingly visible, causing Raishin to clutch his nose.

A cold killing intent from Yaya drifted over from behind him, causing his blood to freeze.

“Don’t tease me like that. There’s a legitimate reason for you being here, isn’t there?”

“Cannibal Candy might prove to be a more troublesome opponent than we thought.”

“—!”



## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

It appeared she had gotten hold of some new information. Sitting up a little straighter instinctively, Raishin waited for her to continue. However, Shouko calmly sipped her tea, and changed the subject, to his irritation.

“That was quite the reckless stunt you pulled, boy. I heard you got into a scuffle with ten automata.”

“... It was a one on one at first.”

“And then you ended up destroying none.”

“I did destroy some. Half was Charl’s handiwork, but all ten ended up as scrap—”

The lens buried inside the eye patch flashed. He felt the eye stare at him from deep within like it was buried in a bottomless ravine, and found his excuses dying halfway out of his mouth.

“Do not misunderstand, boy. Puppets aren’t humans.”

Those were sharp words. Yaya’s shoulders stiffened at her cutting remark.

“Your naivety borders on hubris. Until you stop the heart, an automaton will not die. Your act of compassion then could return to stab in the back one day. The ambition you harbour is not so easy that you can achieve it without staining your hands. Take that sentimentality and cast it away into the deepest pits of the earth.”

“... I cannot follow that order.”

He knew he was being childish, but Raishin still stubbornly refused.

“Automata have a sense of self. They can feel pain and they can feel pleasure. They even have hearts. How does that make them any different from humans?”

“Foolish child... You still do not understand anything, boy.”

With a hint of pity in her voice, Shouko coldly spoke.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“If you kill a human, the law classifies it as murder—if you destroy an automaton, it’s only considered damage to property. It matters not what you think, boy. Open your eyes to reality. There is a chasm separating the two.”

“Even so, to me, automata are human as well. If you stop an automaton’s heart, it’s the same as killing a human. I don’t care what society thinks, that is what being a puppeteer means to me.”

“... It’s only going to get worse, you know?”

“I am prepared for it.”

“I see. In that case, try as much as you can to stick to your optimistic principles.”

Although she was blunt, a faint but unexpectedly gentle smile surfaced on her lips.

Raishin was captivated by it. Of all the smiling faces he had seen up till now, this was by far the prettiest.

“About Cannibal Candy.”

Sipping her tea, she returned back to the topic at hand.

“It’s a far bigger enemy than you thought it was, boy.”

“Bigger...?”

“The military thought the people who’d gone missing might provide a clue to narrowing down the true identity of Cannibal Candy. Naturally, they promptly began their investigation into the victims. However—”

“They couldn’t be found.”

“Exactly. Over twenty boys and girls just upped and vanished from the face of the earth. Cannibal Candy isn’t just eating dolls; he’s doing away with the owners— or possibly their corpses. Because of that it’s looking like he really does eat them.”

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Hiding a corpse require a back-breaking amount of effort. A large number of killers were undone because of trouble with hiding the bodies of their victims. Burying the bodies left behind freshly dug earth. Carving up the bodies would leave massive amount of bloodstains. In the first place just moving the bodies alone would be tough. Keeping them alive and hiding them might be an easier option.

Nevertheless, they were talking about a large number of people. For an individual to be able to confine so many was unthinkable.

Was that why she referred to the enemy as bigger?

“The academy, the royal family, or even the British government may be involved in some way.”

“... You’re suspecting the academy of being in cahoots with Cannibal Candy?”

“Doesn’t it seem that way to you? The academy is policed by both security and the disciplinary committee. If someone were to try something, the two layers of protection would clamp down on them immediately.”

However, the reality was that Cannibal Candy was still at large.

Also, so many students had vanished and the cause behind their disappearance was still unknown.

If the academy was really pulling the strings behind the whole affair though, then the disappointing lack of results would suddenly make a lot of sense.

But that would mean the disciplinary committee, the campus security, and even the teaching faculty all were the enemy— wouldn’t it?

“It’s not too late for you to wash your hands off the matter, you know?”

For a brief moment, Raishin was strongly tempted by that course of action.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

If he pretended not to have noticed anything strange... it wasn't as if the academy would disappear if he continued living with feigned ignorance. At most, the student council would just exploit him.

Raishin had a goal. An enemy he had to defeat at all costs.

If he were to involve himself needlessly with other affairs and end up dying, then the only person he could blame was himself.

Even so.

"There's someone I can't abandon."

Having realised something, Raishin muttered it out aloud.

"She's hopelessly rash, barbaric, short-tempered, and always alone by herself. Even so, she isn't a bad person."

His words came in bits and pieces as he continued voicing out his thoughts.

"For some reason I don't know, she's currently chasing after Cannibal Candy. Or possibly, that could have been her goal from the very start... at least I think so. Furthermore, I owe her a debt of gratitude... so I guess I'm obligated to her in some way...argh, dammit, what a pain!"

Ruffling his hair, Raishin raised his head up.

Looking straight into Shouko's face, he told her.

"I want to help her."

"... Did you forget our wager? You bet your life, boy. If you were to selfishly go off and die a dog's death somewhere without my permission, I'd never forgive you."

Raishin ground his teeth. Shouko was right. Just as she said, he couldn't go off and die like that on his own. Needlessly charging headfirst into danger was something unforgivable. However—

He couldn't just abandon Charl either.

Seeing Raishin's frustration, Shouko sighed.

It wasn't a sigh of resignation, it wasn't a sigh to mock him, it was just a genial sigh.

"Yaya, come over here."

Yaya trotted over. Shouko placed her hand on her chest.

Momentarily, a wave passed through Yaya's body.

Raishin had no clue as to what had just happened. Nevertheless, Yaya's eyes started spinning and she started to fall backwards.

"Yaya! Are you ok!?"

He hurriedly caught hold of her. Yaya's eyes were still spinning, but she wasn't visibly injured.

Without giving him any chance to raise his doubts, Shouko carried on imposing information onto him.

"Yaya's Kongouriki is peerless under heaven— but even then, there are some things she cannot go up against. For example, Tyrant Rex's magic circuit Gram."

"Sigmund's blast of light?"

"That's not the most accurate description of how it works. Put simply, light is the result. When the atmosphere is annihilated, light is produced.

"Do you know what kind of magic circuit that is?"

"I can roughly guess. It's a secret formula that is closely related to how the universe works. Because of that, there is no counter-measure for it. No matter how hard the object, or how mirrored the object is, they're all powerless before

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

that magic art. Basically, as long as it has form, it will be annihilated. If Yaya were to be hit by that head on, she would die.

Raishin felt Yaya stir slightly in his arms.

“One more thing. Yaya’s natural enemies are wind and water.”

“Fluid states...?”

“Yes. No matter how strong Yaya may be, she cannot hit something with no shape. Be careful when you encounter opponents with no physical bodies.”

“...Alright.”

Seeing the both of them nod, Shouko was satisfied.

“Well then, sorry for keeping you so long. Be careful.”

“Yeah. Let’s go, Yaya.”

“Roger!”

After making sure that Yaya was in a proper condition, Raishin dashed out of his room.



### Part 3

As Raishin and Yaya departed, Yaya's elder sister—Irori watched them go off with complicated feelings inside her.

"Raishin has calmed down quite a bit. Back then, he was like a ravenous mountain dog."

Shouko took a puff out of her pipe, before languidly replying.

"The passing of time polishes a man. So too do hate and anger."

"Still, for Raishin to throw himself headlong into danger for someone else's sake—"

"That boy would happily get the short end of the stick if it meant someone else would benefit."

"... I always thought Raishin was ruthless and motivated by self-interest. That he would be fine with others getting hurt if it were in the interests of his goal."

"Fufu...then that means you're even less focused than Yaya. I don't remember making your eyes to be that bad, Irori."

Harsh words spoken with a gentle tone, Shouko lightly rebuked Irori.

"The boy isn't ruthless, but the circumstances he was caught up in certainly were. Fate dealt him a cruel hand. You see him as motivated by self-interest, but his current conduct is merely because he's driven by revenge. In short, from the beginning of the beginning, the boy was already like that; someone who would show compassion to even the most bitter of foes."

"Are you referring to him showing consideration for his enemy's circumstances?"

Shouko didn't answer. She just continued smoking her pipe serenely.

Irori quickly grew uneasy.

“Mistress. Was it a good idea to let Raishin go off like that? Like you said earlier, Raishin will be going up against a formidable foe...”

“Are you worried about Yaya? You always did dote on her a lot.”

“Wha—!? T-there’s no way I’d let my personal feelings...”

Her white skin turned scarlet, and she waved her hands frantically about in denial.

“There’s no cause for concern. I’ve removed Yaya’s restriction.”

Irori grew even more worried as she piled on more questions.

“... Will Raishin be fine? What if he gets completely consumed by Yaya...”

“The boy is not so weak.”

“Are you sure? Raishin has barely been a puppeteer for a few years— if I may be frank, he’s like a baby bird that hasn’t learnt to fly yet. I’m sure if you properly explained the situation to him, he would know that he isn’t at the required level just yet.”

“Rather than the enemy, the boy has severely miscalculated his own strength. It’s just that he hasn’t noticed it yet. He hasn’t realised that he’s been blessed with his own innate talent.”

Shouko let out a small chuckle as she remembered something.

“When we first met, the boy was training with a wooden puppet.”

“Wooden?”

A wooden puppet didn’t have Eve’s Heart installed inside it, and so it was just a plain, regular wooden doll.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Obviously, this meant that it didn't have any form of autonomy. Thus, it relied solely on a puppeteer's magic energy for everything— the puppeteer had to control the tension in the joints, balance, and its overall movements. Even for someone with telepathy or a mountain ascetic who had devoted himself to rigorous training, it was still a tricky feat to pull off.

Irori was honestly shocked. Raishin had only started two years ago, but at that point in time he already had magic energy skilled enough to manipulate a wooden puppet. With her eye on his back, Shouko nodded.

"The boy's brother could manipulate a wooden puppet to the point of being life-like. However, he couldn't do that— and so he branded himself as talentless. However—"

Her long eyelashes fluttered downwards as she absentmindedly sighed.

"A regular puppeteer wouldn't even be able to make a wooden puppet stand."

At most, they would only be able to move a single limb at best.

"Fufu...you really are such a fearful boy."

"The Akabane clan were a family of diviners. I've heard they were skilled in exorcism arts and shikigami usage. Are you trying to say that his talent is something to be expected, since he's from that bloodline?"

"Yes, and isn't it wonderful? However, fortune and misfortune are merely two sides of the same coin. It is precisely because he has the Blood of the Scarlet Wing in him that he's suffered misfortune and had his family destroyed."

Irori's mouth shut. Details of Raishin's childhood, the tragedy of his siblings getting attacked, and the genocide of the Akabane clan were scarce.

Both her mistress and Raishin had refused to talk about it at length.

However, she thought the status quo was fine as it was.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

She was content to wait till the time came when Shouko wanted to talk about it. Until then, and even after that, the three sisters would strive to be of help to their mistress to the best of their abilities.

Having reached a conclusion, Irori left the matter aside and changed topics.

“Will Raishin be able to defeat Tenzen?”

“Who knows? That is something he’ll have to attempt to find out.”

“Are you saying that the possibility exists, then?”

Shouko didn’t answer, casting her gaze out to their disappearing figures as she smoked her pipe instead.

After a while, she abruptly muttered.

“This talk about revenge is ridiculous.”

“Eh—”

“If he knew the truth, the boy would hate me for sure.”

A lonely smile which had never been seen before till now surfaced on her lips.

Irori’s thought module started to swim with numerous doubts. However, her brain soon settled down from its chaotic state as she let all her thoughts evaporate away.

As long as her mistress knew the truth, it was fine even if she didn’t.

Irori stared outside the window, looking up at the moon hanging in the night sky.

Her thoughts were very much like a prayer as she quietly lowered her head downwards.

Godspeed, Raishin.

### Part 4

With Yaya in tow, Raishin burst out of the Tortoise dormitory.

It was way past curfew. The boarding master called out from behind him to stop and turn back, but because it was an emergency Raishin ignored him. Having to explain that he was assisting the disciplinary committee, and this was a related matter, was too troublesome.

Following the street lights outside the buildings, he dashed towards the griffon dormitory. The cold night wind caressed the back of his neck, causing his body to shiver.

The conversation he had with Felix earlier replayed itself in Raishin's mind.

"Hey, Felix."

Raishin wanted to chase after Charl, but a hand on his shoulder restrained him from doing so.

Felix held his hand out in a pacifying gesture.

"I know what you're going to say, Raishin. First off, let me just say I'm not doubting your relationship with Charl at all."

"Then why did you go and say all that?"

"Obviously, it was for her sake."

"What do you mean?"

"If I didn't tell her that, she would have continued her reckless actions, no? She's bad at cooperating with others, and working alone is fraught with danger."

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Raishin fell silent. He couldn't think of a response. He was right that Cannibal Candy was dangerous, and that Charl wasn't likely to follow the instructions of the disciplinary committee.

However, while it was logical, he still couldn't accept it, and Raishin doggedly continued on.

"Even if you say that, you can't deny Charl was hurt."

"After we take care of Cannibal Candy, I'll make amends for what I've said."

There was more sincerity in his eyes than usual as Felix said that.

His recollection coming to an end, Raishin clicked his tongue.

By the time they took care of matters, it might already be too late.

Charl wasn't as strong or as aloof as she pretended to be.

(Don't do anything rash, scary dragon girl...!)

"Raishin!"

Yaya shouted a warning. He was lost in thought and his attention to his surroundings had therefore decreased. Suddenly he noticed for the first time there was a presence approaching from directly opposite them.

Reflexively preparing for combat, he extended out a hand towards Yaya. The other party had the same reaction, and braced their body. Catching the light of the street lamps around them, something glimmered in their hand.

It was the cold glint of metal — a knife.

Something felt suspicious as the height of the unknown person caused a sense of déjà vu to pass over him. The body was slender and conservative, with shoulder length hair and a pair glasses giving off an intellectual air... this person was—



“Lisette! It’s me!”

“Raishin Akabane...”

Lowering her knife, she lit a lamp in her hand to check Raishin’s face.

She was alone. As always, her automaton wasn’t accompanying her.

“Are you searching for Charl?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact, I was just on my way to the Tortoise dormitory.”

“You were heading towards me?”

“Knowing you, I felt that you’d come dashing out.”

“— is that faith in me?”

“Don’t get too carried away, you tapeworm.”

“My bad. What did you want with me then?”

“Where were you headed to?”

“In your direction. I wanted to hear your thoughts.”

Lisette had a clouded expression on her face as she gave an exaggeratedly loud sigh.

“Charlotte didn’t have a large circle of friends. If she didn’t think of going to you, and is just foolishly loitering around the area, then the situation is hopeless.”

“Uhuh. Can you phrase that in a better way?”

“Quite simply, I have no clue as to where she could have disappeared to...”

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Pressing her finger to her lips, she was deep in thought. After that, something occurred to her and she turned to face him.

“You were out with her the whole day today, weren’t you? Did she say anything at all?”

“No, not really... In any case, I believe Felix is the cause of her disappearance.”

“Was that a feeble attempt at shifting responsibility onto someone else to hide your own incompetence, you tubifex worm?”

“Why are all your insults fixated on variations of long and thin worms?”

At that moment, Raishin noticed something out of the corner of his eye, and turned to look at their surroundings.

“It’s getting a little rowdy out here.”

Looking closely, he could see shadows moving about stealthily amidst the trees and in the cover of the buildings. Although they had skilfully hid their presence, Raishin’s five senses were sharper than a normal person’s. As long as he stopped moving, he could sense them.

Lisette looked over at them as well, before hesitantly speaking.

“The truth is... the disciplinary committee is putting its full effort into searching for Charlotte.”

“What, is she that important— wait, you’re not suspecting her, are you?”

If the disciplinary committee were chasing after her, did it mean they thought she was Cannibal Candy?

Lisette didn’t even move an eyebrow, but Yaya covered her mouth with her hands in shock.

Raishin stared at Lisette with a questioning look.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Lisette hesitated a little before finally caving in and resignedly confessing the truth.

“Just earlier, several magic circuits were discovered in Charlotte’s room.”

—Magic circuits?

Was she referring to the ones that Cannibal Candy had removed...?

“That’s impossible!”

“It’s the truth. The one who discovered it was the boarding master...”

He went over the facts in his head. It looked like someone was trying to set Charl up— no, that wasn’t it. If Charl really was Cannibal Candy, her magic art would annihilate the magic circuits. If someone was really trying to set her up, doing this would have the opposite effect.

So, did that mean that Charl was hoarding magic circuits for reasons unknown to Raishin...?

Considering Charl’s strength, there was also the possibility she could have inflicted an attack that would leave the magic circuits undamaged.

“We still have yet to verify if the circuits in question are those that Cannibal Candy had removed. One of the professors is currently examining them, but since they’re in pretty bad shape, the results will only be out tomorrow.”

Raishin grew silent as he continued to think.

Judging him to be of no further use to her, Lisette gave a short bow,

“We’ll part here. I should be getting back to the search now—”

‘Hang on.”

Lisette dubiously came to a halt.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Wanting to confirm something, Raishin chose his words carefully and deliberately.

“Would it be correct to say that I am currently someone who’s assisting the disciplinary committee?”

“That’s right.”

“In that case, I would like to carry out an investigation, with your co-operation.”

Her interest piqued, Lisette turned to face him.

“What do you want to do?”

“I would like to confirm something with my own eyes.”

Raishin told her where he would like to go.

Lisette was shocked. A rarely seen troubled look appeared on her face.

“That’s... somewhere where I don’t have the authority to grant you access.”

“Whose permission is needed then?”

“Give me a minute. I need to discuss this with Felix first.”

“So you’ll help?”

“Given the current circumstances, yes. No matter how much of a brainless mosquito larva you may be, for you to request such a thing during an emergency like this must mean there’s a reason behind it, no?”

Although he was a little bothered by some of the things she had said, Raishin nodded.

Lisette told him she would have to make a phone call, and returned back onto the path.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

For a short while, Raishin and Yaya were left alone in the cold.

Yaya was sticking tightly to him, so the cold didn't affect him that much. The wait however, was something that was excessively hard to endure.

Maybe the negotiations weren't going smoothly, or she had completely neglected to mention it, or perhaps she had met an accident halfway; Lisette still hadn't returned.

The anxious wait lasted several minutes. Finally, Lisette returned—

“Be grateful. Felix talked to the executive committee.”

In short, they had been granted permission.

“I will guide you. It's the least I can do since we're co-operating on this.”

“I am in your debt.”

“I shall have to decline your gratitude. This is merely part of my duties after all.”

Having spoken curtly, Lisette started walking ahead of Raishin.

She led them towards the most important block of the academy.

Heading past the central auditorium, passing through the back of the clock tower and cutting across the headmaster's residence, there was a large rectangular building that looked like a gravestone.

The building where all the important machines were stored away, the Locker.

“Before you enter, you should know that your entry is subject to one condition.”

The expression on her face was five times more severe than normal as she gravely spoke.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“Inside, countless automata are stored in a state of hibernation. Needless to say, they are all completely defenceless. If you wanted to, you could easily destroy them, and their owners would be unable to participate in the Night Party.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m not going to stoop to that level.”

“I’m just saying the possibility exists, you pond scum.”

“So I’ve been demoted to a microorganism now? Fine, I get it. I’ll leave Yaya here.”

“Raishin...”

Yaya looked up at him with a worried look on her face. Her large eyes glimmered, reflecting the light from the lamp. She looked as innocent and helpless as a puppy.

“Shout if anything happens. It would be tragic if you were attacked by Cannibal Candy.”

“Yaya will be fine. More importantly, Raishin...”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be with Lisette.”

“Being alone together with that woman means your chastity is in danger...”

“... You’re still going on about that?”

“You have no cause for concern, sex-obsessed doll. In the unlikely event he does attack me, I will bite my tongue.”

“I’m not going to attack you! Both of you stop your nonsense!”

Ending the conversation, Lisette took the front again, and walked towards the rectangular building.





## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

There were sentries posted at the entrance, and more security personnel in the guardroom. Lisette pointed at her armband to indicate they were here on disciplinary committee business.

It looked like the guards had been informed already. After processing their entry, they handed over a master key.

The inside of the building was the same as its façade, lacking in any form of decoration whatsoever. Its floors, walls and ceilings were all built with straight lines, making it feel choking and confining.

The lights inside were all switched off, so they headed deeper inside with only their lamps lit up.

“So, what do you wish to confirm?”

“A third-year student’s automaton. If my logic is correct, then it could prove to be a decisive clue to locating Cannibal Candy.”

“In that case, we should be heading up to the second floor. This way.”

“... Can I ask you something?”

“I don’t have a boyfriend, but I rather die than have sex with a playboy like you.”

“...”

It was an awkward moment. Lisette coughed in what appeared to be embarrassment.

“That was a joke. What is it?”

“What kind of automaton is Felix’s?”

Lisette thought for a while, searching through her memories before answering.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“I don’t exactly know much about the details, but I have seen it before. I don’t know if this is true or not, but I’ve heard rumours that it was made during the Renaissance period.”

“So it’s an antique?”

“It’s not something you can just dismiss lightly. The Renaissance period was a time in human history where countless exceptional geniuses walked the earth. Techniques that are now lost to us existed back then, and there are magic arts from that period that we have yet to break down. Felix’s automaton is also theorized to be one of the miracles created by those geniuses.”

“... That’s no surprise. Anyhow, I can at least say it’s an automaton that got him listed in the Rounds.”

Even though it was a remnant from a century ago, it was still in active use— an automaton like that couldn’t be just dismissed as obsolete. It was likely far superior to modern craftsmen’s handiwork, and there had to be a secret to it.

“So what sort of magic circuit is installed inside it?”

“Well, I don’t know that much... I might be his assistant, but I am also a Night Party entrant. It’s not prudent to reveal your hand to someone who will become your opponent someday.”

“I guess that’s not surprising as well.”

“It’s just—”

“Just what?”

“When we were doing field practice before, he created lava.”

“Lava?”

“Yes. He heated the earth and used it to dig trenches. Also, during another time, he manipulated dense fog to throw the enemy team into confusion.”

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

“Fog... you’re sure it wasn’t just steam?”

If it was a magic circuit that revolved around heat manipulation, then it was possible to generate both lava and fog.

“No, it was more natural, like it was an extension of his nerves or senses.”

“What the heck is that? Unless he’s using several magic arts together in conjunction... but no way, something like that should be impossible.”

In any case, he was sure to be a troublesome opponent. Lava and fog were both fluid states without form.

Having reached the top of the stairs, Lisette came to a halt.

“Felix’s locker is in the room furthest back on the right.”

“It’s alright, I don’t plan on going there.”

Lisette’s eyes narrowed in puzzlement.

From the flow of their conversation, she had the impression that they were going to search Felix’s locker.

Raishin took the master key from her hand, and started walking off in the opposite direction.

He had already grasped the layout of the building.

“That’s—“

Behind him, Lisette was saying something. Raishin ignored her and opened the door.

The lockers resembled caskets, and were lined up in orderly rows.

Relying on the nameplates, he looked for the locker he was searching for.

## Chapter 5 – From The Beginning of The Beginning

---

Before long, he discovered what he was searching for.

Registration code **White Mist**— Listette Norden.

Suppressing his impatience, he used the master key to unlock the lock, and opened the cover with an air of finality.

“...!”

Inside the locker, there was a large glass cylinder.

It looked like a giant test tube. The liquid that filled it completely looked just like formaldehyde. Enveloped in that liquid, just like a biological specimen, there was a completely naked girl suspended within.

It wasn't an automaton.

Peeking out from her split chest was real tissue and real flesh.

Raishin cursed his own foolishness.

I am such an idiot. This... how could I have not noticed something so obvious?

In other words, from the beginning of the beginning, she had been here all along.

Suspended inside the glass cylinder, this was—

Lisette Norden's corpse.

The next moment, something hit Raishin from behind with enough force to knock the wind out of him.

## **Chapter 6**

### **True Self**

#### **Part 1**

The previous night.

After inspecting the devoured automaton, Lisette called out to Raishin just as he was about to go off.

She informed him of the dangers of associating with Tyrant Rex and warned him to be careful. She also told him that Sigmund was a Bandoll.

Shortly after that.

“Do you have any questions so far?”

“Yeah, I—”

The youth in front of her spoke lightly— but his eyes had a sharp glint as he spoke.

“Why were you there when Cannibal Candy was devouring his prey?”

They gazes clashed with each other. She could feel her eyebrow start to twitch. Lisette pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose, replying him with her face hidden.

“Are you trying to say I’m Cannibal Candy?”

“But you were there, weren’t you?”

“No. I just received the report and dashed quickly to the scene. By the time I reached though, Cannibal Candy had already disappeared.”

“Oh? I was under the impression that you had seen the moment of the attack.”



“... Why would you think that?”

“Hm. Is that so? I see.”

“Please stop with your insinuations. It is extremely upsetting.”

Raishin gave her a sidelong glance. It was a strong stare, the weight of which caused a shiver of fear to run down her spine which she couldn't suppress.

“You identified one of the devoured puppets as the morning star wielder, didn't you?”

“... I did.”

“How did you know that? The face was smashed in; you shouldn't have been able to identify it at all.”

“Anyone who saw it would have come to the same conclusion. There was that unique iron ball—”

“Which was smashed into the legs of the devoured puppet, wasn't it?”

Lisette was taken aback. She finally realised what Raishin was implying.

“Yes, it looks like you get it now. Anyone who saw that situation would normally assume that the morning star wielder was the one who attacked. For anyone to conclude that the weapon had been turned against the user himself, you'd have to have some form of advance knowledge. Like— if you already knew that the devoured puppet was the morning star wielder from the very beginning... for example.

“... That's if you thought about it normally.”

Desperately trying to keep her voice from trembling, Lisette made her counter argument.

“I didn’t think that the perpetrator would leave behind specific evidence that would be incriminating. If Cannibal Candy was using something, he surely would have taken it with him when he left.”

“Is that so? He looks to be more of the sort who leaves his leftovers lying about as they were.”

“That in itself isn’t something considered unique to his M.O.”

“So that was the logic behind your conclusion.”

“Stop trying to find faults where they aren’t! I’m totally innocent!”

Raishin wryly laughed and raised both hands in a gesture of peace.

‘Don’t get so worked up. It’s just a doubt that’s been bothering me for a while.’

Turning away, he started walking in an unguarded manner.

“That’s all I wanted to ask you. Well then— oh, right.”

He stopped. Turning his head over his shoulder.

“I think you’ve misunderstood something. At no point did I ever say that you were Cannibal Candy.”

“—!”

“I just asked if you were there.”

“It appears I was mistaken.”

With an irritating laugh, Raishin left the room.

Lisette bit her lip tightly— and in the next instant, she lashed out at the teacher’s lectern.

The lectern crumbled easily, the wreckage scattering about on the floor.

## Part 2

The moon's light failed to reach here, the darkness deep and impenetrable.

'Here' was a tunnel formed by trees that was a little ways off the main street. Even during the day it was pitch black.

Amidst the darkness, Charl was walking at a brisk pace.

Her body leant forward, she was taking big strides with squared shoulders.

Behind her, Sigmund was flapping his wings to catch up.

"Let's go back, Charl."

Charl ignored him and continued pressing forward.

"How long do you plan on carrying on like this?"

"You're being very noisy. Be quiet."

"Stop adding to your list of crimes committed. Return to your bed."

"Hmph. It's not a crime as long as I'm not caught."

"Cease this foolishness, Charl."

Sigmund flew in front of Charl and bared his fangs. While skilfully flying backwards, he started to lecture her like a nagging old man.

"You should already know by now, even if you succeed by doing things this way, it won't bring you happiness. Do you plan on living your whole life as a social outcast? What you need right now is the acknowledgment of other people. Stop trying to shoulder burdens all by yourself. There's no one in the world that doesn't need a friend to walk hand in hand with."

“I told you to be quiet already, didn’t I!?”

She smacked Sigmund away.

“If you keep this up, I’ll change your daily diet to peanuts.”

Sigmund stubbornly regained his posture, flying in front of Charl once again.

“Why are you so worked up? Did Felix say something to you?”

Charl lips snapped shut.

Sigmund sighed in resignation.

“It shows on your face. You’re too easy to read sometimes.”

“Quiet. If you understand, then just shut up and help me.”

“All the more reason to refuse, Charl. If you really want to be acknowledged by that man, cease this recklessness. Stop being so impatient. Fight and win inside the Night Party fair and square and you’ll silence all the gossip surrounding you.”

Charl suddenly came to a stop.

Perhaps Sigmund’s words had pierced her, but there was an anguished expression on her face.

“But I can’t forgive this...how can you expect me to sit quietly by the side and watch on...!?”

“You’re not a representative of the law; neither are you a disciplinary committee member. This vigilantism is merely your own selfishness.”

“That’s just a coward’s logic! Noblesse Oblige—“

The fire in her eyes died out almost as immediately as it had appeared.

She had already noticed her error, without Sigmund having to point it out.

Charl was using the pretence of public indignation as a surrogate for her own anger and hatred.

Sigmund gently landed on her crestfallen shoulders.

“You have a precious dream. Don’t taint it by fighting meaningless battles. You have your family to think about—”

“That’s enough, Sigmund.”

Her voice was unnaturally strained. Sigmund immediately fell silent, raising his head up and scanning the surrounding darkness.

Finally, he noticed something.

Fifty metres ahead, to the right of their current location, there was an alien object wriggling about!

The shadow was crawling around on all fours at the base of a tree, hidden inside the impenetrable darkness.

It showed no signs of breathing, and it moved soundlessly—it wasn’t human. Considering the time and the place, there weren’t any humans who would be crawling around on all fours now.

So, it was an automaton.

The edges of Charl’s lips twisted. For a brief moment, her aristocratic face morphed into a dreadful mask of ferocity like a savage beast.

“Finally, it looks like we’ve found our prey.”

“Wait, Charl. We should ascertain who or what that is first.”



“All the good boys and girls should be in bed by now. The only kind of people who would be sneaking around at this time of night...”

Charl began to radiate magic energy from her hair to her shoulders. Inside the darkness, the bluish white light that shone sparkled like moonlight. Extending her hand out to Sigmund, her magic energy coalesced into a bundle of light which flowed into Sigmund.

Sigmund’s body began to react, but he didn’t grow any bigger.

“It’s no good, Charl. There isn’t enough light here.”

“It’s fine even if you’re like that. Make sure you keep him alive, Raster Flare!”

The little dragon opened its jaw. Countless needles of dazzling light poured forth from Sigmund’s mouth, flying towards the shadow, impaling it. As its name implied, it was not the blast of a cannon, but contained the smaller explosive power of a flare.

The quadrupedal automaton collapsed under the attack.

All four limbs were pierced with the needles of light, pinning it to the ground.

“Got it!”

Charl rejoiced. Just as she ran over to confirm what she had hit,

“Don’t move!”

Intense and angry voices closed in on her from all four sides.

Hidden in the treetops and shadows, countless human presences revealed themselves.

Charl realised she had been completely surrounded. There were eight— ten individuals. All of them had their lamps turned towards her. To call their attitudes hostile would be an understatement.

Also, all of them had an armband around their arms.

(The disciplinary committee...!?)

His smooth golden hair fluttering, someone walked up in front of a discomfited Charl.

“Pefect timing, Charl. Or rather, I should say this timing is better than perfect.”

“Felix—”

Felix turned gloomily towards the quadrupedal automaton, pointing at it.

“That’s one of my spare automata. I thought I’d see if I could try to fish Cannibal Candy out, so I released three baits into the open.”

Charl was confused. She didn’t understand the meaning behind Felix’s words. Was he upset that she had interfered with their search?”

“Charl. Do you know why I’m here?”

“This is a sting operation...”

Felix nodded.

“I heard you sneak out of your room. On the off-chance something might happen, I ordered the area to be cordoned off.”

Was she being suspected of being..?

As soon as she realised it, she was gripped by an unspeakable fear.

“No! I thought that automaton was Cannibal Candy!”

“So you were trying to capture it, is that right?”

His gaze was full of suspicion. Being stared at like that, Charl felt her explanation slide back down her throat.

“You are a scheduled entrant into the Night Party. Even so, Cannibal Candy would still be a threat to you. Surely he wasn’t that big a threat for you that you needed to proactively hunt him outhowever, was he?”

“I just... I thought...it was unforgivable...”

“The boarding mistress has already testified that you’d been sneaking out of the dormitory regularly.”

Charl flinched in surprise.

That certainly was true.

As trivial as it may have been, Charl did break the rules, and she had done so repeatedly.

“Did you think your absence would have gone unnoticed?”

“But I wasn’t doing anything to feel guilty about! I snuck out of the dormitory—”

“To search for Cannibal Candy.”

“That’s right!”

“Oh, Charl...don’t you think it’s time to drop the act?”

“—!”

Felix shook his head. He had a bitter expression on his face that was a mix of resignation and betrayal. The look in his eyes was no longer gentle or kind.

“Now that I think about it, your actions have been incomprehensible as of late. You kept talking about Cannibal Candy with indignation in your voice— but that too was strange.”

Felix sighed. When he started speaking again, the warmth in his tone had vanished.

“You hate people, and you don’t mix around much with others. How could I have expected you to feel any sympathy for those students who were attacked? Also—”

There was no emotion in his voice as he continued in a monotone.

“You got close to Raishin Akabane; someone who hates people as much as you got close to someone as callous as him.”

“No—!”

“In other words, your hatred of Cannibal Candy— it was merely a show you put on.”

“No! I really—!”

“If we assume everything you did was to avoid suspicion, then all the pieces fall into place.”

“Why!? How can you say that!? What evidence is there!?”

“There is evidence. We found it in your room.”

Charl’s eyes widened. They couldn’t have— did they find that!?

“Wait, I can explain! Those magic circuits—”

The disciplinary committee members stirred. Charl realised her mistake.

“Charl... So, those were really hidden by you.”

Felix had a sad look on his face. On one hand, there was the possibility of a third party hiding them—someone who had a grudge against Charl, or even Cannibal Candy himself could have placed them there to frame someone else. However,

Charl had mentioned magic circuits herself, and so those circuits were now incriminating evidence.

However, it couldn't be helped and she couldn't defend herself. The truth was Charl herself did conceal a large amount of magic circuits in her room.

"You have harmed a large number of students thus far."

Once again, she couldn't say anything for it was the truth.

"You were always aloof and solitary, and your surroundings were filled with nothing but enemies. Under these circumstances, wouldn't your hatred build up?"

"What are you implying?"

Felix spoke slowly, like he was trying to confirm something.

"The reason why our investigation could never get a hold of Cannibal Candy was that he was a loner, therefore no one had any clue as to his movements."

"..."

"After learning that Raishin Akabane had agreed to assist the disciplinary committee, you felt a sense of danger. Why? Because he wasn't afraid of you and persistently tried to approach you despite your rejections. If anyone were to get close to you, they would smell a rat."

"..."

"And that's why you went out with him; to create an alibi and so throw suspicion off of you. Or maybe, you were trying to get him on your side? Fortunately for you, you do possess great beauty."

Her shoulders trembled. This was mortifying. To be thought of as someone who destroyed automata for no good reason and use seduction as a means to an end.

“You should understand what I’m trying to say, no?”

Felix gave a long, deep sigh, like he was emptying out his lungs.

Staring at Charl with bitter chagrin, Felix finally spoke.

“In other words, Charlotte Belew. You’re Cannibal Candy.”



### Part 3

Raishin was sent flying from the violently painful blow he received on his back.

Crashing into the locker, the glass shattered as they both smashed into the wall, causing the violently loud clatter to echo throughout the building.

Slowly, blood began to spread across the floor.

After the dust had settled, Raishin was left buried under the locker, completely unmoving.

Lisette emotionlessly watched over the chaos.

Having heard all the sounds, the guards soon came flying in. Two guards burst into the room without making much noise, their automata in tow.

They were on high alert and in battle stances. Their automata in front, they had Lisette in their targets. The puppeteers' voices were exceedingly cold as they asked,

"What happened here?"

Lisette panted wildly and her voice was raised as she replied.

"C...call the executive committee please."

"What happened? Are you ok?"

"He...he was going to destroy the automata here, so regrettably, I had to attack him."

Still remaining on high alert, one of them moves inside the room to confirm Lisette's story.

"I see. Wow, this is pretty bad."

The puppeteer grimaced as his lamp illuminated the pool of blood on the floor.

“You did this by yourself?”

“Luckily, my automaton was here.”

She pointed to the locker. The guard was a little suspicious, but didn’t press any further and turned back to Raishin’s body.

“He’s still breathing, albeit faintly.”

“I tried to avoid trying his vital points. However, it would be best if we brought him to the doctor’s office immediately.”

“We’ll arrange that. Leave this to us.”

Signalling his partner, they started to turn and walk away, but Lisette called out to them.

“Please wait. There is a possibility that he— Raishin Akabane is working with Cannibal Candy.”

“What do you mean?”

“He might have tried to create a disturbance here so as to cover up the movements of Cannibal Candy. Something he said intimated as much. So just to be sure, can you do something about the automaton in front...?”

“Alright. We’ll restrain it.”

“Please.”

“What about you?”

“I have to rendezvous with the rest of the disciplinary committee and report this to them. There’s a chance that Cannibal Candy will move— no, there’s a possibility that he may have already made his move.”

“Hm... You’re the eyewitness to this commotion. I’d prefer it if you remained here.”

“In that case I will return as soon as possible. My name is Lisette Norden, a third year in class F.”

She handed over her student identification card. With that, the guard seemed to have some faith in her. Her membership was clearly stated, and she was also the disciplinary committee chairman’s assistant. Someone of her calibre... with that in mind, he decided he could permit Lisette to leave the scene.

Lisette sealed her locker before exiting the room at a quick pace.

### Part 4

In front of the gravestone shaped building—the Locker, there was a bit of a commotion going on.

The person in the middle of the commotion was none other than Raishin. He was currently receiving first aid— He was being swathed in bandages roughly and indiscriminately.

Surrounding him was the guards and some disciplinary committee members. While treating him, some of them went to check up on the damage done inside.

Raishin was completely limp as they did as they pleased to his body. His eyes were half opened, but there was no light in his pupils. After they finished first aid he was loaded onto a stretcher, all the while his body not even giving the slightest twitch.

“That’s quite an awful racket going on over there. Is there some kind of festival happening that I don’t know about?”

Their killing intent immediately honed in on the voice. Ignoring those gazes like it was something none of her concern, a woman causally strolled up to them from a small path. Wearing an educator’s uniform, she was a tall lady with a white coat.

“Professor Kimberly...why are you here?”

Someone spoke up. Kimberly had an air of nonchalance about her.

“I occasionally go for walks around the area.”

“Eh? You go for walks... at this hour?”

“I was forced to offer my expert opinion on something bothersome, so I thought I’d take a stroll in the night wind to refresh myself as a change of pace. It’s only logical, right?”

“Uh... I guess...”

Forcefully inserting herself inside the ring of people, she started laughing at the stretcher-bound Raishin.

“How unsightly, Second Last. You look terrible with those wounds.”

However, Raishin didn’t respond to her insults.

“Huh? Did he lose consciousness or something?”

“Yes. He was knocked out.”

“To faint with his eyes half open... such a creepy fellow. Hm...his breathing is shallow, and his body temperature is low.”

Touching Raishin’s skin, she immediately realised the danger he was in.

“If I’m not mistaken, his ribs have been broken. His lungs also have been punctured. Hurry up and move him.”

Having been alerted, the people handling the stretcher became slightly less rough with their handling. Although they definitely didn’t treat him like a fragile object. With Raishin swaying dangerously from side to side on the stretcher, they started transporting him to the doctor’s office.

Watching them depart with a grim face, Kimberly addressed her question to no one in particular.

“Was he lynched or something? His whole body has been battered up.”

“No, the one who did this was a third year student named LisetteNorden. Apparently, he was going to wreak havoc inside the lockers.”

“A one on one fight...and he was beaten up that badly?”

Her eyes widened in surprise. Kimberly grew restless as she asked,

“Where’s his automaton? She’s a short girl with black hair.”

“Ah, she’s right over there.”

“The guard pointed over to where a girl was being transported away, surrounded by the guards’ automata.

Her hands were bound behind her back, and she was being lifted up by her ankles. The nape of her neck to her back were covered in slash wounds, exposing red flesh beneath. There was a large amount of blood, and her entire body was covered in bruises. Kimberly was shocked by the fact there was blood and that her flesh could bleed. She was exactly like a human.

While looking at Yaya, Kimberly frowned.

“Hmph. It looks like this one’s half dead as well.”

“Ah, no, I mean...she was on a rampage, so we had to...”

Feeling a little guilty, the guard tried to explain it away.

“Rampage? Hmph...you say that, but I don’t see any wounds that are consistent with self-defence.”

On the contrary, it looked like she hadn’t resisted at all. The damage inflicted was limited to her back, with her arms and her face showing no wounds whatsoever. It looked like they had stealthily attacked her suddenly in order to avoid any hassle.

“Don’t you think you overdid it a little? Two level E capture rings, and three magic insulation codes— do you think you’re fighting a legendary dragon?”

“But we heard this automaton defeated ten Benchwarmers.”

While internally cursing them for playing it safe, Kimberly asked.

“What do you plan on doing with it?”

“We’ll bring it to the executive committee. Raishin Akabane may be related to Cannibal Candy in some way. He’ll have to be brought in for questioning.”

‘You think he’s in cahoots with Cannibal Candy?’

A dangerous presence filled the air. There was a piercing look in Kimberly eyes as she said,

“Was that supposed to be a joke? Is that kind of joke in vogue nowadays?”

“No, I mean, I ‘m not too sure on the details myself...”

“—!?”

Suddenly, Kimberly put her guard up. Twisting her upper body, she reached into her breast pocket. Her actions were almost mechanical in nature, like she was a soldier in the army and it had been rigorously drilled into her.

“Professor? What’s the matter?”

“Just now— that automaton moved, didn’t it?”

The guard turned around to look at Yaya, who was as lifeless as a dead fish on a cutting board, before uneasily refuting her.

“It couldn’t have. There’s no way it would be able to. Her ego has been sealed after all.”

“No, I could have sworn it moved.”

“You must have been seeing things, professor. Her magic energy has been completely cut off from her. In her current state, she wouldn’t even be able to talk. In the first place, her frame has already taken a considerable amount of damage—”

“Get back! Down on the ground now!”



As she shouted, Kimberly had already leapt backwards.

The guard couldn't react. Barely had he turned his head around, when he was sent flying.

There was a loud sound of an explosion, and a bluish-white light shot out.

Colossal magic energy was leaking out from her. Something akin to hot air was being vented out from Yaya's entire body into the surrounding atmosphere.

(What the hell...? This...this is like some sort of... monster...?)

Amidst the hot air, Kimberly could see Yaya tearing off her metal restraints as easily as they were made of paper.

Her silhouette was distorted because of the shimmering effect of the hot air.

The combustion of magic energy was intense. Like a gas burner, bluish-white flame was being shot upwards.

(There's... a horn...?)

The moonlight bounced off it, giving it a pure white sparkle. It was on her brow, shimmering like it was made out of diamond. Without stopping to check her body, the atmosphere around Yaya began to tear as she moved.

Her figure was the spitting image of a yaksha.

An instant later, Yaya's shadow had completely vanished—

Leaving behind the guards, who stood still dumbfounded, and a befuddled Kimberly.

## Part 5

The sound of the loud explosion reached all the way to where Charl was.

The ground rumbled, then there was a violent wind. Unrest began to spread amongst the disciplinary committee members.

“What was that?” “It sounded like it came from the Locker.” “Did something happen to the chairman’s assistant..?”

Felix raised his hand to quell the unrest.

“Teams C and D head over in that direction. Most likely, there’s some trouble going where Lisette is. She’ll definitely need backup. The rest of you retreat and form a cordon fifty metres away from here.”

One of the disciplinary committee members was surprised by the order, and spoke up.

“Chairman, that’s a risky move. Your opponent is the T-Rex!”

“I’ll be fine. I am a member of the Rounds after all—“

Felix grinned, his usual smile on his face.

“And my automaton has just arrived.”

Right on cue, something appeared behind Felix. Or rather, it would be more precise to say something was descending behind him. It was a female silhouette, and it landed with a soft thud.

It was an automaton wearing armour— if it had to be summed up in a single word, it would be a Valkyrie. It had on old-fashioned armour and was carrying a greatsword. The helmet covered her face fully, so it looked like some sort of demonic mask.

(This is...Felix's automaton?)

It was Charl's first time seeing it in person. It appeared to be the disciplinary committee members' first time as well, as they were staring at fascinatedly. Sigmund grew wary, giving off a low growl.

"Now then everyone, please fall back."

The disciplinary committee members glanced at each other, hesitant.

"Chairman, that's an order we can't follow. The enemy's not only the T-Rex, she's Cannibal Candy as well—"

"You still don't get it?"

Felix's voice froze over suddenly.

Unimaginable from the normal Felix, his voice was now as cold as ice.

"You'll be in the way, is what I'm trying to say."

Everyone got cold feet. It was clear to them what was about to happen.

Following Felix's orders, they spread out in a circle, moving away in all four directions.

Their presences rapidly faded away into the distance. Eventually, the area surrounding Charl and Felix grew silent, and Felix quietly spoke, his regular grin back on his face.

"Let's have a nice, long chat, Charl."

Her heart grew cold. That regular smile now instilled fear inside her instead, and she asked him,

"Do you honestly believe I'm Cannibal Candy?"

“Of course I’m serious about it. It would be a problem if I weren’t.”

—What did he mean by that?

However, before she could voice her doubts, Felix continued to speak.

“Honestly, the original plan was for him— Raishin Akabane to defeat you. I was able to successfully lure him out on the pretext that you had gone missing... at least that part went off without a hitch. Well, it doesn’t matter anymore. I’d say he’s done enough for me.”

“Raishin?”

She had a nasty feeling. She felt her throat rapidly dry up as she asked,

“Did you do something to him as well?”

“I’ve just taken care of him. My comrades will take care of the rest.”

“Did you kill him!?”

“I didn’t. I just broke him, and his doll.”

“Why...!?”

“He was performing subversive activities inside the Locker.”

“—!”

“Having to do that was just a slight modification to the plan. He still had some value to me, so it was a pity I had to do it. If he had opened my locker, then all would have been fine, but he just had to go and open the one locker I didn’t want anyone to open— so I couldn’t let him roam about freely anymore.”

Value? Locker?

Charl had no idea what he was talking about.

Charl's brain was replaying a different line that Felix had spoken earlier.

Raishin was lured out— because he was searching for me?

"Why!? I don't understand! You're the one who dragged him into the whole affair in the first place!"

"Oh, Charl. To think I valued you so highly. You're not very quick in the head, are you?"

Felix sighed. Giving her a look of scorn, he shrugged his shoulders.

At that moment, like a lightbulb going off in her head, Charl finally understood.

She finally saw the whole picture. As much as she didn't want to believe it, it was the worst case scenario.

She bit her lips. Her knees shook. Speaking slowly, like she was emerging from a state of confusion,

"You... used... me...?"

"It was too good an opportunity to pass up, Charl. If you want hate something, hate the fact we were doomed to meet. Curse the heavens for putting both you and I into the academy in this year."

No... Felix shook his head as if to say.

Like a giant crack on the earth, a dry smile emerged onto Felix's face.

"Curse the fact that your Raster Cannon is similar to my Predator."

Finally, Charl understood everything.

The situation had been like this all along.

Everything she thought she knew was actually reversed.

Felix didn't show kindness to Charl because their magic arts were similar.

It was because their magic arts were similar that he tried to get close to her.

Everything had been carefully calculated.

He feigned concern about Charl to get close to her.

Everything he said to her was meticulously prepared as well. His gentleness had been a sham.

He was going to frame Charl with all his sins, and kill her as Cannibal Candy—that was his deceitful plan all along.

In short, Felix had been the enemy all along.

Felix was Cannibal Candy!

At that moment, Charl's world literally crumbled into darkness.

There was no sound, no light; everything had vanished. Her muscles felt like they had been replaced with lead, dead weight which weighed down heavily on her.

Who would believe Charl's version of events?

It would be her word against the disciplinary committee chairman's. All the evidence conveniently pointed to her. In fact, there might even be some fabricated ones to help the case.

There wasn't a single person that would believe, understand, or defend her. Even now she remembered Sigmund's advice on making friends, but it was all too late.

Something warm began to drip down onto her cheeks.

Her emotions raged inside her. However, there was nothing she could do, and she felt an extraordinary sense of helplessness. Sobbing like a little baby, all Charl could do was to let her tears flow.

“This... is too cruel...”

“It’s regrettable. If it’s any consolation, I’m telling you about everything at the very least.”

“But why..? Why would you..?”

“Don’t be stupid. What other motive could there be for enrolling in this academy?”

Felix’s tone was light and refreshing.

“To become the Wiseman, of course. I am going to become the king of the magic world.”

Charl felt like a fist had been buried into her. She felt her brain go numb and her senses dulling.

Felix had a grin on his face, and his gentle tone was like his normal self.

“The Night Party is a merciless battle for survival, where the person who eliminates all other obstacles in his or her path gains everything— that was what you always liked to say.”

“ ... ”

“I liked that part of you. As a matter of fact, I agreed with you wholeheartedly. It’s just—”

His eyes turned cold as he finished his sentence.

“—there was something about you I couldn’t stand...your naivety.”

He extended his hand out to the automaton beside him.

Magic energy extended out from his palm, linking him to it and firing up the puppet.



The magic circuit began to activate. With the automaton as a conduit, Felix's magic energy was expressed as a phenomenon of physical alteration.

The invisible energy began to build up, before being released.

In a flash, a torrent of light shot forth from the puppet's sword.

Actually— it was the sparkle of water.

Like an arrow, the fierce torrent of water flew straight at her. The water took the form of a sharp spear, aiming straight for Charl's brow.

Sigmund leapt into action, using his small body as a shield to protect Charl.

The torrent gouged out flesh, causing fresh blood to spurt out and hit the floor. The little dragon was sent forcibly flying backwards, collapsing onto the ground.

"What are you doing, Charl...!? Hurry up and support me..!"

Sigmund called out to her. However, his voice didn't reach her ears.

Felix prepared his next attack, focusing his magic energy. Even that didn't enter her field of vision.

Charl remained sunk down on the floor, unable to do anything else but cry.

Her mind was a blur, but one thing stood out the most.

How am I going to apologise?

If it was just her, then it was fine. This was punishment for her own foolishness.

However, Felix's schemes had also involved someone else other than Charl.

Because of my stupidity, those two—

He was a rude person, but meant well.

His automaton too, got dragged into this messy affair.

Now they were going to suffer because of her.

“Raishin... I’m sorry—”

Just as Charl’s apology left her mouth, the sparkle of water indicated something had slashed through the air.

Transforming itself into a lethal shape, the sharp end was about to neatly pierce both Sigmund and her—

However.

With a clang, a metallic sound assaulted her eardrums.

She snapped back to reality. Jerking up her head reflexively, a most beautiful sight came into her eyes.

The moonlight sparkled dazzlingly, reflected through the water droplets.

The spear-like jet of water was blocked by them, dispersing harmlessly.

Two shadows appeared in front of Charl.

The one who stopped the water spear was a small and slender girl.

Directly behind her, with his hand on her back, there was a youth.

His bandages fluttered in the wind, and the girl’s hair did so likewise. His entire body was drenched in blood, the severity of his wounds obvious to Charl even in the darkness of night.

“Don’t apologise, you idiot.”

With his blood-stained back to her, his voice was curt, but there was strange warmth in it.

“There’s nothing you’ve done that you need to apologise for.”

He turned to stare at the enemy.

To protect Charl, he was going to fight.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Beast That Hungers For Eternity**

#### **Part 1**

A short time before Raishin had appeared in front of Charl.

The guards carrying the stretcher had been assaulted by a mysterious shadow.

The shadow had stolen the grievously wounded person on the stretcher, and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

And right now, the shadow gave off a stench of blood as it ran into a grove of trees.

It was the figure of a girl. Her torn kimono fluttered in the night wind, exposing her skin, which was like fresh snow. Her flowing black hair whipped about, but she strangely showed no signs of exhaustion.

Obviously, it was Yaya, and she was carrying another shadow on her back.

With his right foot on the sash tied around her waist, and his left knee on Yaya's shoulder, Raishin was literally being carried by Yaya. Displaying an extraordinary sense of balance, Yaya continued to run without dropping Raishin at all.

"Are you ok, Raishin?"

"I'm... fine."

His brow was covered in cold sweat. Every time Yaya kicked off the ground, Raishin's body tensed up.

It looked like he was in pain. Yaya lowered her speed out of concern, but—

"Don't worry about me. Right now, all you need to focus on is the upcoming fight."

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

He was obviously overdoing it...but Yaya obediently followed his orders. If her master said he was fine, then as an automaton all she could do was to believe and support him.

“More importantly though, let’s continue our earlier conversation. Something you were going to tell me before we go into combat.”

Yaya nodded. She told him what Sigmund had told her earlier this evening.

“Charlotte is searching for her scattered family.”

“Scattered? Isn’t she some proper lady from a noble house?”

“It’s true that the Belew house of nobles was an eminent family in the British Empire.”

While dashing through the grove of trees, Raishin wordlessly pressed her to continue.

“Count Belew, Charlotte’s father, was known as an avid collector of automata. There were numerous automata in his home, and everyone got along well, so all of them passed their days like a real family, automata included. But...”

One day, a boy of extremely high social position came to visit as a guest.

Charl’s dog automaton ended up hurting the boy.

The count received an extremely severe reprimand from the royal family. His countship was stripped from him, and his lands were confiscated. A large number of the automata which were part of their family ended up being dismantled.

“Hmph, such a troublesome kid. Which family did that brat belong to?”

“I don’t know. All Sigmund would say was he was from an extremely high social position.”

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

With their assets frozen, the family fell into poverty. The former count couldn't find any work in the country, so he was forced to move to France to work as a puppeteer by himself.

However, things didn't seem to go well for him. Before long, contact with the former count was lost.

While Charl was off at boarding school, her sister's and mother's whereabouts were lost to her as well.

Finally, she ran out of money for her school fees, and was kicked out of the boarding school.

However, she ran into good fortune... sort of. The Belew name was famous for Machinart. The Royal Academy of Machinart, Walpurgis was an institution that placed more weight on potential rather than hearsay. Even a felon's daughter was welcome here. With a student loan, she was able to enrol into the academy.

Ever since then, Charl began working towards her dream.

"I see. So the reason why she hates Cannibal Candy so much is because she doesn't think of automata as mere puppets..."

Also, the sin that she had spoken of earlier—

The reason her family had been broken up was because of her very own automaton.

Having heard Yaya's explanation, Raishin nodded, deeply moved.

"So, Charl's dream is—"

"Yes. She wants to revive the Belew household. She's already managed to repay her student loan, so all that's left is to buy back the heart of her family."

Treating the matter as one of great importance, Yaya softly continued.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

“So that she can live with everyone again, one day.”

“Well, this completely sucks.”

Raishin scratched his head and clicked his tongue in irritation.

“To live with her family again— she wants to stand atop the Night Party for that? She’s wants to kick aside all other puppeteers and take the Wiseman’s throne for that reason? If she’s serious, then she’s a bigger idiot than I am.”

Raishin spat out, but contrary to his words, the hand that was gripping onto Yaya’s shoulder was strangely burning up.

Yaya understood very well why.

Raishin had come this close to crushing Charl’s earnest dream with his own hands.

Because of that, he wanted to protect her and her dream, whether it was right or wrong.

Because of that, Yaya also requested that Raishin use her as his tool to do so.

Yaya felt her blood boil as she sprinted with all her might, cutting through the night wind.



### Part 2

The back of the person that had defended Charl was covered in blood.

He was still in the middle of treatment. Underneath his torn up clothing, his naked skin was covered in swaths of bandages. Said bandages were torn in places, making them absolutely useless. In such a state however, the bandages didn't fall off him because they were stuck there by the half dried blood.

He was wobbling on his feet.

It was clear he didn't have enough blood in his system. Even then, Raishin had protected Charl.

Her vision grew blurry and she covered her mouth with her hands.

"I'm sorry Raishin...so sorry..."

"I told you not to apologise. It doesn't suit you, scary dragon girl."

"But...because of me...you ended up getting hurt so badly...!"

"You're wrong."

In a strong, sharp voice, like he definitely didn't want to admit it, Raishin chose to flatly deny it.

"You're the one who's hurt badly."

A cold anger, like a silently burning flame, drifted over from Raishin's back.

His anger and his intensity enveloped Charl's heart, which had been sliced open and tread on.

Ever so slightly, the pain eased a little.



## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Hugging onto the injured Sigmund, she lifted her face up.

“Do you not understand the situation here..?”

Across from them, Felix was staring at Raishin and Yaya with a perplexed look on his face.

“Listen carefully to me, Raishin. Cannibal Candy’s true identity is Charl. As the disciplinary committee chairman, I have an obligation to capture her and bring her in for—”

“Heh. This is such a lousy performance; even the scenario is third-rate.”

Felix’s face twitched.

While staring at Felix, Raishin suppressed any emotion in his voice as he spoke.

“No matter how many enemies she faced— even if say, there were ten of them, she wouldn’t kill a single one.”

He thought back to the day when he had first met her.

In the aftermath of that battle, it was clear Charl hadn’t killed a single automaton.

“The Raster Cannon is an attack with a large range that is extremely hard to control. The power behind it also isn’t something half-assed. With that in mind it took considerable skill to not kill anyone, even though there were so many of them caught in the blast. The enemy had just performed a cowardly sneak attack on her—no one would have any objections or complaints if she killed them there and then in the course of turning the tables.”

Finally, Raishin declared aloud.

“Even though she herself was in danger, she was still concerned about her enemies’ life— there’s no way someone like that could be Cannibal Candy.”

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

At that moment, Charl's heart was filled with immense warmth, like the sun was shining directly on it.

She'd always thought she was all alone.

There were only enemies surrounding her. Things like friendship and trust were concepts that she was fated not to have.

However—

Even now there was someone who understood her and believed in her.

Felix disappointedly starred at Raishin, before starting to laugh.

His carefree voice had a hint of provocation in it as he asked Raishin.

"In that case, what do you plan on doing?"

"Obviously, I'm going to defeat you and put an end to Cannibal Candy's rampage."

Next to Raishin, Yaya braced her herself, lowering her posture.

There was a sharp glint in Felix's eyes.

"You wish to go up against me?"

"Yeah. Both you and Lisette, who's standing next to you."

Charl couldn't comprehend what Raishin had just said.

Timidly, she asked Raishin,

"Did you just say Lisette...?"

"It's exactly as I said. That person over there was serving as the chairman's assistant up till just now."

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

“But it used a magic art... so it’s an automaton, you know?”

“Sit and watch quietly. I’m gonna smash that ugly helmet and expose her face for you to see.”

Felix snorted.

“That’s quite a boast there, Raishin. If you think you really can pull it off, just try it, I dare y—”

“Suimei Shijuuhachishou.”

He heard Yaya acknowledge the command from far in front of him.

To Charl’s eyes, it looked like Yaya had turned invisible. It took a while for her to realise that it was just an afterimage left on her retina.

She was like a swift gale. With one bound, she closed in on the enemy automaton and attacked.

However, the enemy was no slouch either. The Valkyrie swung her sword, intercepting Yaya.

The exchange took place in an instant. Yaya used a bare hand to catch the sword, before thrusting the other out sharply at the automaton.

The Valkyrie jerked her neck away to avoid the blow, but Yaya’s finger tips grazed her helmet. The mask portion crumbled like it had been torn off.

Yaya took a huge leap backwards, somersaulting as she landed. As her foot touched the ground, the Valkyrie’s mask fell onto the floor, revealing her face for all to see.

It was an unsociable emotionless face.

It was unmistakable— that was Lisette Norden’s face.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Charl's eyes widened. She tried to say something, but her words failed her and she remained speechless.

"Calm down, Charl..."

Sigmund whispered coolly to a panicked Charl.

"A puppet's face can be easily changed at will...Lisette Norden was definitely a human up to a certain point in time...mostly likely she was murdered and he replaced her with his automaton..."

It was easy to make an automaton's face resemble a human's. Present technology and techniques enabled the creation of joints and the feel of skin that closely resembled a normal person.

Felix had modified his automaton, and had it take Lisette Norden's place in school.

He had deceived everyone. The disciplinary committee, the boarding master, the professors. Also, he had deceived Charl.

While feeling everything she had believed in crumbling one after another, Charl started to shiver as her consternation grew.

She didn't know what to believe in anymore.

On the other hand, Raishin was the picture of calm as he spoke lightly, ease in his tone.

"Your metallic mask is fine, but I think you look prettier this way. What's your real name?"

"Don't be stupid, Raishin. I have no reason to tell you such a thing."

"Don't butt in, Felix. I'm talking to her, not you."

Felix fell silent. His pride had been hurt, and his pretty face was distorted in anger.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

It was her first time seeing him make such a face. For the first time in her life, Charl experienced the sharp pain that disillusionment brought with it.

Lisette looked like she was thinking about it, before telling him “Eliza”.

“Ok, Eliza. Let me ask you this. Will you not retreat now?”

“—”

“A tool cannot choose its master. In other words, you have committed no sin. I will not blame you for killing all the people you have killed so far. So, retreat now.”

Lisette—Eliza— fell further into thought, before speaking.

“Please sleep talk only when you’re asleep, you maggot.”

“Is that your own will?”

“It looks like you’ve misunderstood something.”

A split second later, Eliza’s emotionless façade crumbled away.

A wicked smile that seemed to reach her ears etched itself on her face.

Her violent laughter sent a chill down Charl’s spine as Eliza spoke.

“Do you hate eating?”

“... It’s a relief to hear you say that.”

Raishin’s presence changed.

The anger that had been burning up inside him— it was now a frigid killing intent.

He held out his right hand with his left propping it up. Releasing magic energy, Raishin shouted.



“Kouen Sanjuurokushou!”

“Roger!”

Yaya moved like a speeding bullet. The enormous magic energy that Raishin released entered her back, pushing her forward at an explosive speed.

Countless spears of water greeted Yaya as she dashed forward.

The spears were shot out in quick succession like a machine gun, but Yaya didn't stop. Unbothered by the rain of spears falling on her, she charged forward like a fireball.

From Charl's position, she couldn't see things clearly, but it looked like the spears had no effect on Yaya. The torrent of water which was strong enough to penetrate Sigmund's armour was unable to pierce Yaya's skin.

Yaya closed in on Eliza in an instant. Dodging her sword, Yaya adjusted her trajectory by ninety degrees, jumping upwards. Drawing her extremely white thighs inwards, she coiled up her legs.

Then with all of her might, she brought her heels downward.

Yaya's attack struck Eliza's head unerringly.

In that moment, the sound of a dull splash reached Charl's ears.

He eyes didn't betray what her ears had heard. A large volume of water splashed up and out as Yaya's legs went through her head.

Eliza's body turned into water droplets and was scattered all over the place. Obviously though, that wasn't the end. The droplets began to coalesce, forming a pool of water. The pool of water rose up to take the shape of an automaton—becoming Eliza again.

(Water...?)

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Eliza wasn't just able to control water; her body could turn into a liquid state.

This was extremely similar to something Charl had already witnessed first-hand just the other day, inside the academy. The one who used such a magic art was the puppet that had been devoured by Cannibal Candy.

Its name was Undine. The magic art that the automaton was equipped with was exactly the same as Eliza's.

Could it be...? Cannibal Candy was able to use the magic arts of the puppets he had devoured?

"I see your automaton relies on sheer brute force. Unfortunately for you though, Eliza cannot be defeated through punches and kicks."

While laughing, Felix taunted Raishin.

"I have already seen how you fight, and it is absurdly simplistic. You shout the attack you're going to use, and you pin the enemy down. Such a vulgar, barbaric and primitive style. To compensate for this weakness though, you came up with a battle plan. By attacking in combination with your automaton, you can come up with complicated tactics... However—"

Felix waved his hand. In response, Eliza attacked.

She fired out four spears of water in succession. All of them were aimed at Raishin instead of Yaya.

Throwing himself flat on the ground, twisting out of the way and jumping back, Raishin dodged the first three.

He was unable to dodge the fourth one, and it sliced his flank. Raishin sank down on his knees in pain, pressing a hand to stop the blood from flowing out.

"Look, your movements are so dull. Considering the state you're in, it's useless for you to fight in that way."

“Raishin!”

Yaya, flustered, rushed over to Raishin. Raishin stopped her from doing so,

“Don’t get distracted. Kouen Nijuuyonshou!”

He channelled magic energy into her once more. Yaya had a pained expression on her face, but obediently moved to attack.

Approaching Eliza again, Yaya punched, kicked, and struck her.

It was a fierce onslaught. Water was splashed all about the place, forming a mist. However, Yaya’s attacks seemed to be meaningless. The droplets of water gathered almost immediately, reforming Eliza’s shape.

“You don’t seem to get it.”

Felix sneered, releasing a torrent of water aimed at Raishin.

This time though, his attack was read. Yaya quickly blocked off the trajectory of the shot, crushing the spear of water.

“I won’t let you lay a hand on Raishin.”

Felix clicked his tongue. Being as smart as he was, that one shot told him everything he needed to know.

This attack no longer had any use.

A spear of water had a straight trajectory. As long as Yaya stood in the way, it would be hard to hit Raishin. Yaya speed was several levels higher than Eliza, and she was as tough as steel.

It was a deadlock. Both sides lacked a decisive finisher, making it an unpleasant situation to be in.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Surprisingly though, Felix also seemed to hate the fact that they were in a stand-off.

“Well then, how about this?”

Preparing for a new attack, Yaya braced herself, but Raishin was unexpectedly pulled off his feet.

Raishin suddenly found himself hanging upside down.

Still upside down, Raishin was forcefully yanked into the air.

A bluish-white light of something—a chain was binding his feet together. Like a giant lasso, Raishin was swung in the air and sent flying into a magnificent pine tree.

““Raishin!””

Both Charl and Yaya cried out.

Crashing into the trunk, he spat out globs of blood.

### Part 3

Someone was standing on the roof of the central auditorium.

As if he was lording over the place, a man with a silver mask was looked down at the ground.

It was the person closest to the Wiseman's Throne, Magnus. Surrounding him were his flower-like maidens. Wandering about aimlessly while counting the stars in the sky, they were enjoying the night.

Suddenly, the smiles disappeared from all of their faces.

Turning to face the same direction, their ears were perked up, making them look like cats who had just sensed a disturbance.

As they focused their gazes, someone lightly landed on the rooftop.

"Spectating, are we? I guess you are in the position to do so."

It was a tall lady in a white coat— Kimberly.

"Well, I guess I'm also in a position to do so."

She had a feline like grin on her face. She wasn't overawed, even with the maidens' overtly hostile intent directed at her.

In the first place, where had she appeared from? Had she been flying overhead in the sky before landing..?

Paying no attention to the maidens on high alert, Kimberly wandered around the rooftop, trying to find a suitable point to spectate from. Having found somewhere which satisfied her, she parked herself in front of the water tower, reaching into her bosom to retrieve her glasses.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

The battle was unfolding in the middle of the grove of trees. Visibility was poor, since it was so dark. Quite frankly, putting on a pair of glasses shouldn't have been able to help visibility, but...

"Hm, I count five, six... no, eight disciplinary committee members. They look like they're surrounding the area, but there's too much distance between them and the fight. They won't be able to ascertain the situation like that.

She accurately analysed the situation. The surprise in her voice was obvious for all to see.

"Second Last is on the verge of dying. This confrontation, not to mention his physical strength— oh?"

There was a flash of bluish white light from inside. A magic circuit had been activated.

"Felix was the one who moved first. Considering that he has them surrounded, wouldn't it be in his best interests to prolong the fight?"

While saying that, she turned to look at Magnus. Kimberly tone was like she was asking a student for his opinion.

However, Magnus dodged her gaze, turning around on his heels and starting to walk away.

"Hey, you're not running away now, are you? At least stay until the end."

"There's no need. The fight's already been decided."

"—What?"

Kimberly turned back to look into the grove. The sounds of battle were still echoing inside. Contrary to Magnus's words, the fight looked like it was increasing in intensity. — How was this decisive?

Magnus muttered something like he was talking to himself.





“Once you’ve figured out the trick, the rest is child’s play.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Too much of a hint has already been given to him.”

Kimberly’s eyes narrowed her eyes sharply. He gaze was like it could see through people’s hearts.

Magnus walked away, before suddenly coming to a halt.

“I’ll give you a warning.”

Turning only his head around, there was an eerie red glow coming from the inside of his mask.

“If you give him a more than obvious hint, I’m sure other people will come to know of it in the not so distant future. That would certainly be a hindrance to your investigation, Professor Kimberly.”

“... I’ll keep that in mind.”

With an “excuse me then.” Magnus departed. The maidens all rose and followed after him. One of them stuck out her tongue at Kimberly, causing her to grin wryly.

“The same goes for you, Magnus.”

She turned her eye back to the battle. The battle was about to reach its decisive climax.

### Part 4

Seeing Raishin throw up blood, Charl sprang to her feet like a bullet.

This wasn't the time for her to be on the floor. Hugging Sigmund to her chest, she ran to the foot of the tree.

Raishin fell from a height of about two stories. Turning himself in mid-air, he landed on his feet.

"You idiot. Don't come so close to me."

Charl was amazed. When Raishin had said he knew martial arts, he wasn't kidding. An attack like that could have killed a normal person, but he was fine—at least on the surface. Even with his body all beat up, he was able to recover his balance and reduce the impact of the attack.

While a sense of relief swept over Charl, there was another scream from behind.

Turning around, she saw that it was Yaya who was now suspended in mid-air.

Again, there was some kind of chain wrapped around her legs. Most likely it was formed from magic energy; some sort of magic art that produced a chain. Charl had also seen this before, it was used by the morning star wielder.

It was unbelievable. Cannibal Candy could use a multitude of magic arts!

Eliza swung her sword, sending a helpless Yaya crashing to the ground.

It was a heavy blow. Yaya's body bounced off the stone floor like she was made of rubber.

Yaya's back was cut in places as fresh blood began to flow out. The wounds weren't fresh; Eliza's blow had reopened the earlier ones. Up till now she hadn't suffered any injuries, but her steel-like defensive power failed to activate this time.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Charl understood two things then. Firstly, Yaya's resiliency wasn't due to her body toughness, but it was powered by a magic art. The second thing was Yaya couldn't activate that magic art if Raishin was in bad condition.

Felix also seemed to have realised as much. With a sadistic grin on his face, he commanded Eliza again. Yaya was lifted into the air once more.

Yaya's limbs flailed about wildly as she tried to remove the chain— but it was useless.

Because she was hoisted in the air, she had no firm footing.

Cold fear passed over Charl.

It was like she was freezing. Hugging tightly to Sigmund, she shook with despair.

Even if she wanted to help Yaya, Sigmund was grievously wounded... Besides, in her current state, helping would be fatal. Because she was out of it, she wouldn't be able to focus any magic energy at all.

More importantly though, was the fact that the enemy's power was excessively strong.

Using multiple magic arts went against the normal laws of Machinart. After a hundred years or so, the secret behind this antique doll created during the Renaissance was finally being revealed.

Its liquid state helped diffuse Yaya's herculean strength, and its chain nullified Yaya's speed.

Not only did it possess these two magic arts, but Cannibal Candy had eaten its way through a lot of other automata.

The number of known victims was at least twenty. If all of their magic arts were now Eliza's, then she'd be more than a match for an army.

At this rate, they would be tortured to death!

“Don’t worry. I’ll end this fight soon.”

Bringing her head up in surprise, she saw Raishin had rose to his feet. Blood was pouring from his body and he was covered in wounds, but there was a sharp glint in his eye. He hadn’t lost his will to fight yet.

“Just stop already! You don’t have to concern yourself with me any longer!”

Before she knew it, Charl was yelling at him.

Raishin turned to look at her with a ‘what are you talking about?’ look on his face. Charl was half sobbing as she said,

“At this rate, you’ll end up dying...!”

However, her desperate entreaty didn’t reach Raishin.

Raishin just snorted, and started walking towards Felix.

“Stop! You want to take part in the Night Party, don’t you!? If you’re tagged as my accomplice, the executive committee—”

“You’re not Cannibal Candy. There’s nothing wrong in helping you.”

“But you can’t prove it! They’ll surely brand you as a related party! And not just the academy, this country, the magic association, everyone...the world will become your enemy.”

“Stop making such a fuss. If that time comes,”

Raishin paused.

“I’ll just fight against the world if I have to.”

Raishin wasn’t worked up; his stance was open and relaxed.

However, she could see there was an unshakable resolve inside him.

How could he have that attitude— he was actually laughing?

“Why...why are you going so far for my sake...?”

Raishin didn’t answer. He just walked over to Felix.

Even though Yaya was still tied up, Raishin still walked towards him without any hesitation.

Felix nodded to himself, impressed.

“You’re still trying? I see; you really are the person I expected you to be.”

With both arms spread out, Felix spoke heatedly with a serious expression on his face.

“Join me, Raishin. Become my ally and fight alongside me in the Night Party, and I’ll overlook this incident. I’ll even guarantee Charl’s safety. And of course, just like I promised you from the very beginning, I’ll see to it you get an entry qualification—”

“I refuse.”

“You really like to make swift decisions, don’t you? This time though, I suggest you calmly think through this for once; what do you say?”

“I wouldn’t be your subordinate even if my mother asked me to.”

“... You should honour your parents, you know.”

“Unfortunately, they’re already six feet under.”

“My condolences. It’s still not too late for you to honour them though—”

An extremely wide smile on his face, Felix spoke.

“—in hell. Goodbye, Raishin—give your mother my regards!”

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Eliza raised her sword. The chain followed her movement, lifting Yaya high into the air. Yaya's blood scattered into the surroundings, some of it landing onto Eliza's face. Ignoring it, Eliza swung her sword downwards.

Her target was Raishin. She was planning to use Yaya as a weapon to smash Raishin.

“—!?”

In an instant, Yaya's figure suddenly vanished.

There wasn't any afterimage generated that Charl could see. A split second later, Yaya had reappeared right in front of Eliza, making Charl think Raishin had just about managed to pull something off.

Displaying surprising agility, Raishin sidestepped while controlling Yaya at the same time. As Yaya slammed back down onto the ground, the moment her feet touched the earth, she used her leg strength to sever the chain.

“Tenken Shijuuhachishou.”

Colossal magic energy poured forth from Raishin's right hand. As Yaya's body swelled up with magic energy, she unleashed a violent kick at Eliza. An enormous amount of mass could be felt within her slender leg, giving off a tremendous oppressive pressure.

Eliza pulled back the chain of magic energy, wrapping herself in layers of it as a shield against the kick.

It was a barrier of chains. However, Yaya's kick had a lot of weight behind it. Easily slicing through the chain like it was made out of cobwebs, she broke through the layers and reached Eliza's body.

Eliza dodged before the full impact of the kick could hit her. However, she did it by the skin of her teeth. There was a crack in her armour, and a portion of it fell off.

Charl was stunned by what had just transpired.

Why hadn't Felix made use of Eliza's liquid state?

"Well, if you think about it, it's pretty obvious."

Raishin quietly answered Charl's doubts.

"The Magic Activity Dissonance Theory has never been disproven."

Many practitioners had been trying to solve the conundrum of using different types of magic arts simultaneously, but since it had never been achieved, the dissonancy theory was accepted as a fundamental basis for Machinart.

"Taking the enemy's magic circuit and making it your own—if such a convenient circuit existed back then, then it would be in mass production today to produce abnormally strong weapons. However, that isn't true. In other words, it isn't as convenient as it first appears to be."

Obviously, there must have been some demerit to its usage.

Maybe the conditions to use it were extremely harsh. Or it had a prohibitively high cost to manufacture. Or maybe you had to give up something in exchange..?

"Do I have to spell it out for you? It's not cost-effective."

Raishin told her, and Charl finally realised Eliza's flaw.

"Putting it simply, the magic circuits are disposable. Once they've been discarded they can't be reloaded. There's also a limit as to how much you can use a circuit. That's why a large number of circuits have to be amassed."

It made sense. If the circuits could be reloaded at will without any limit on the number of times it could be used, then there was no need to hoard an excessive amount of circuits. There was also no need to risk getting caught sneaking out every night to commit the murders.



Raishin had contempt in his voice as he continued.

“In preparation for the Night Party, you ate as much as you could. Then you were going to shift the blame onto Charl, and erase her from the competition for ‘being’ Cannibal Candy— that’s despicable, Felix.”

Felix was rendered speechless for a moment.

After that, he laughed lightly as he shook his head.

“Well done, Raishin. Your insight is remarkable, to be able to discern your opponents unique traits in such a short interval. And your powers of perception are keen as well. Your talent is amazing, but now I’m afraid I have to withdraw my earlier offer... you’re too dangerous to be left alive.”

A cruel glint flashed in his eyes.

His brow began to emit sparks of magic energy. There wasn’t as much pride in his expression as there was earlier. His instincts were telling him that this was an opponent he needed to crush using all of his strength.

The battle began anew.

Eliza and Yaya both kicked off the ground at the same time.

Clashing at high speed, the fight moved into close combat.

Eliza used her sword to block Yaya’s fierce kick. At that instant, a wall appeared in front of Eliza. Giving off a metallic gleam, it looked like a specialised magic art used for defence. Yaya’s vision was now blocked, her attack defended against, and for a short moment, her movements were stopped as well.

Felix didn’t hesitate. He discarded the magic art even though it had only been used once, loading a new one.

Blocked by the wall, Yaya landed, only to find the ground beneath her had become as soft as cotton.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Her boots sank in. It looked like he had used a trapping magic art. Her foot stuck, Yaya lost her balance.

Smashing the erected wall, a powerful flash of light shot out from Eliza's mouth.

It was dazzlingly bright. Raishin and Charl were temporarily blinded.

After their sight had returned—

Yaya's body was hoisted into the air, just like she had been earlier.

Only this time, the thing that was binding Yaya was a white fog.

A vapour that looked like it had been bleached white was coiled around Yaya, suspending her mid-air.

Eliza was nowhere to be found. If he had to guess, that white fog— was probably Eliza herself!

Yaya struggled and trashed about, but the grip on her didn't loosen at all.

Her kimono began to melt away, and her beautiful skin was turning red from inflammation.

She was being corroded. It wasn't any ordinary fog. It looked like some sort of vaporised elixir that acted as a universal solvent.

It was a fluid form that possessed attacking power. Striking straight at Yaya's weak point, this magic art was both offence and defence at the same time.

Like some kind of automated chess programme, Yaya was slowly being cornered.

The attack itself looked to be painful, as Yaya had a look of anguish on her face as she twisted her body.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

“The reasons for my victory are countless. At the point in time when we started this battle, Liz had forty-seven types of magic arts under her control. And you? Just the one. Not only that, your magic art is exceedingly primitive.”

Felix seemed assured that victory was his, ecstatically revelling in it.

“Your magic art however, is magnificent. You harden your automaton’s body to an extreme degree, such that neither fire nor blades can hurt it. However, in the end— it’s just another form of material to be dissolved.”

This was an attack that functioned by destroying things on a molecular level.

The proof of that was that Yaya’s skin was slowly being eaten away.

“This is the White Mist. Originally, I obtained this so I could go up against the Magnus, but—”

With a venomous tone and a laugh filled with evil intent,

“—in exchange for its loss I’ll take your magic art, Raishin. By eating your puppet.”

Yaya continued to writhe in agony. The hairs on Charl’s neck stood on end.

There was nothing she could do, except continue to tremble...

“Yaya.”

In a cruelly calm voice, Raishin quietly called out to Yaya.

“Kick her ass.”

‘What are you talking about?’ thought Charl surprised, as Yaya drew an arm backwards—

And punched the white fog with all her might.

Felix coldly laughed. A second later, the expression on his face changed totally.

With a dull thud, Eliza was sent flying.

Smashing hard into the ground, she bounced off it. The arc she flew in was quite big as well. Clearly, she wasn't in a gaseous or liquid state. She was denser, a colloidal viscosity to her form. On top of that, her appearance was like a membrane that had been stretched thin, no droplets of water scattering from her body.

Charl, Felix, and Eliza, who had been hit, couldn't believe their eyes.

"Hey, Eliza. Where did your armour go?"

At Raishin's words, Felix stared at Eliza in blank shock.

Her helmet and sword had vanished. Mostly likely, this was because they had also been converted to mist when she transformed.

In other words, the armour that was on her had been reabsorbed into her body now.

Being as bright as he was, Felix immediately understood what had happened just from that.

"Your... automaton's... fluids...?!"

"Correct. The trick to this was Yaya's blood."

Yaya's toughness was ridiculously strong. That special quality of hers extended to her blood as well.

And Eliza had been absorbing that blood. The mist was basically her internal circuitry.

"Two different types of magic art cannot reside in the same body— this is the fundamental basis of machine physics."

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Magic arts couldn't function in harmony— two magic arts would interfere with one another, and cause both of them to be unable to produce maximum output. Therefore, Eliza was now unable to fully maintain her fluid form.

Charl stared at Raishin's back in disbelief.

The current state of affairs was definitely no coincidence. This was what Raishin had been aiming for all along. That would explain why he had been so calm from start to finish.

In that case, thinking back to when the wounds on Yaya had reopened.

That moment when she had been smashed to the ground and had taken damage.

Were all those part of the plan as well?

Charl felt a tremble going down her back.

"Yaya's magic circuit is simple. I may not have as much talent as you, or be as smart as you... but."

Raishin thrust his hand forward.

"My partner is the world's best automaton!"

He put in all the magic energy he had left. Yaya's body began to glow, shining with some sort of aurora.

Then she charged forward.

It was like a flash of lightning. Yaya sent out shockwaves as she rocketed straight towards the enemy's bosom.

Eliza's movements were sluggish. Unable to regulate her body, she found that maintaining a gaseous or liquid state was beyond her control. Felix was caught in two minds over whether he should continue controlling her in her current useless

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

state or switch out her magic circuit for a new one, ending up paralysed with indecision.

“Tenken Zesshou—“

At Raishin’s command, Yaya softly drew near to Eliza, her fist making contact with her body.

“Hakyaku Suigetsu!”

The sound of an explosion resounded, sending waves undulating across Eliza’s body.

Yaya’s muscles, or her equivalent of muscles, explosively hardened, and with the force of a mortar behind it, screwed her fist into the enemy’s body. With such a fearsome impact, the enemy’s body exploded.

The explosive energy reverberated throughout Eliza’s body, causing the membrane to rupture.

The white fog turned into droplets and scattered in all directions. By now they were merely water droplets, Eliza was unable to gather them or reform her body. Falling to the ground, she was soaked into the earth.

Raishin thought he was hallucinating, but in her last moments, he could have sworn he saw a faint smile on her face.

Letting out a huge sigh, he slowly turned around to face Felix.

“Now then...”

Like a hawk that spotted its prey, Raishin centred his gaze onto Felix. Felix was clearly flustered, the look on panic on his face quite unlike him.

“W-what... are you planning on doing?”

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

His voice was raised and his cheeks twitched. It was undeniable— it was a face filled with fear.

“I am the heir to the Kingsfort family. Any violence towards my being will not be tolerated by the royal family, you know?”

Raishin didn't react to that, wordlessly drawing closer to Felix.

“Wait. It seems you still don't understand the situation you're in. If you do anything to me, the doubt surrounding Charl will never be cleared. You should reconsider your position. Only I can prove your innocence now. As long as you have my word—”

Raishin was still unmoved. He was blatantly ignoring Felix as he continued to walk towards him.

“Wait. Hold on... I said wait, didn't I!”

Losing control of himself, a half-crazed Felix pulled out a gun.

However, quicker than he could pull out the gun, Raishin had already closed the distance between them. Kicking the gun away, Raishin grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, lifting him bodily into the air.

Then, he buried his fist into Felix's face with all of his might.

It was a punch strong enough to break his nose. Felix was sent hurling into the air, crashing into a large tree behind him before collapsing into a heap on the ground. It looked like he had fainted.

Looking at his figure slumped over by the tree, Raishin turned to Yaya with a grimace on his face.

“... I'm sorry, Yaya.”

“Why are you apologising?”





## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

“It must hurt. You’re bleeding... and those wounds, I should have...”

“Yaya will quickly recover from all those! The truth is Yaya isn’t injured at all. Raishin’s always the one who’s getting hurt...ever since that time—”

Raishin interrupted her with a hug, pulling her close to his chest.

“Thank you.”

Letting go of the temporarily ecstatic Yaya, he turned towards Charl.

She was startled. She put more strength into the hand holding onto Sigmund without thinking.

If Raishin realised Sigmund had been severely wounded, then he would realise that he would be able to defeat her easily the way she was now.

However, the first thing Raishin said was—

“I’m sorry, Charl.”

“Eh...?”

There was a mischievous twinkle in his eye as Raishin chuckled.

“It’s because I left ‘the great T-Rex’ all by herself that you ended up getting hurt like that too.”

Charl could feel her own expression begin to crumble.

Her tension disappeared almost in an instant, and warmth flooded in like a stream.

Now, she knew. There was someone she could believe in.

Someone who would fight and bleed for her sake.

## Chapter 7 – The Beast That Hungers For Eternity

---

Someone who believed in her.

Her thoughts and emotions rushed in one after the other, leaving her too overwhelmed to speak.

All she wanted to do at the moment was to hug him and cry. Whether he knew that or not however, Raishin teasingly spoke.

“C’mon, stand up, scary dragon girl. Did your legs give out?”

“Wha... I can stand just fine, you insolent man! I can stand, but...”

She couldn’t look directly at Raishin. With upturned eyes,

“Can’t you... at least give me a hand?”

With a gentle laugh, Raishin extended his hand out.

Staring at his hand, Charl hesitated for about ten seconds.

It was soaked in blood, covered in wounds, uncouth, and barbaric, but nevertheless, it was a warm hand with its palm open to her.

Finally, she reached for it with her own.

Firmly grabbing onto her hand, Raishin pulled Charl to her feet.

## Epilogue

### The Puppeteer From The Far East 2

“Raishin Akabane. Step forward.”

The headmaster’s voice sounded clearly throughout the dreary auditorium.

This was his first time seeing the headmaster up close. Unlike the image of a decrepit old man he had in his mind, the actual headmaster was a robust big man with an elegant moustache.

“In my name of Edward Rutherford, I hereby acknowledge your candidacy for the position of the Wiseman, and permit you to participate in the Walpurgis Night.”

Laid out on a silver tray, a resplendent glove was brought to him.

The embroidery done with gold thread was beautiful. It was made out of first-class silk, giving it a brilliant lustre. Because his dominant hand was in a cast, Yaya received it on Raishin’s behalf.

Lowering his voice, the headmaster whispered to Raishin somewhat affectionately.

“As of now, you are an official Gauntlet— a glove bearer. Set an example for the rest of the students and become a splendid puppeteer.”

It was a simple award ceremony, and as such it ended quickly on that note.

The headmaster left, and so did the number of professors in attendance, leaving him behind in the auditorium.

Walking out into the illuminated hallway, Raishin walked towards the entrance and was startled.

It was about to be sunset, yet a large crowd had gathered outside.

It was all students. It looked like they had been waiting for Raishin to come out. There were a few evil stares in his direction mixed in, but a large majority of the students' expression were positive. A lot of them were dressed like Raishin, having deliberately put their coats on.

It took a second before Raishin realised they were all in admiration of him.

"Why did this suddenly become so grand?"

"Because the headmaster arranged for it to be so."

A voice cut in suddenly. Looking around, he saw Kimberly sitting down in one of the chairs in the lobby.

"You're like a flatworm, you know that? You were just discharged yesterday, and yet—"

She laughed sarcastically. Her eyes swept over Raishin, from his shoulder to his right arm, to the crutches in his left hand, and finally to the bandages tied around his neck.

Considering how beat up you were, I'm surprised you can even walk. It looks like you didn't suffer any serious injuries."

"Well, this time around they'll take longer to heal."

"Is it because you're getting old?"

"From some odd reason it sounds like you're speaking from experience, professor. So, what about the headmaster?"

"The disciplinary committee chairman was the true culprit behind this whole affair. So there's been a whirlpool of distrust and suspicion focused on the academy both on the inside and from the outside. By promoting you as the hero of this affair, he's hoping he can deflect some of the bad press."

If that was true, then the headmaster was a sly fox.

Kimberly looked at Raishin's glove— the words etched onto it, to be more precise, and grinned.

"That suits you. Now you'll officially be known as **Second Last**."

"Who was it that applied for such a shitty codename?"

"Why, me, of course."

Raishin shut his mouth. Kimberly continued grinning at him,

"Don't be such a sourpuss. Thanks to my eyewitness testimony and machine analysis, the both of you were cleared of all suspicion. Doesn't that make me your benefactor?"

Raishin sealed his mouth even further. He realised he was now in a strange person's debt, much to his dismay.

"Go on, the spectators are waiting. Time to be the trophy wife— I mean the court jester, mister hero."

"That change in expression was redundant."

Raishin sighed and was about to walk out, when he stopped suddenly.

"I have something to ask you, Professor Kimberly."

"Go ahead."

"You were the professor in charge of my entrance exam. You of all people should have known how bad my academics are. So then, why didn't you laugh at all when I asked you how could I become the Wiseman?"

"That's simple. I used to be bad at my studies too."

Raishin was surprised. Kimberly's controlled voice had a hint of sentiment to it that wasn't usually present.

“People gain reasons to study. I’m sure you yourself have your own reasons to do so. It’s as simple as that.”

He didn’t know what to say, so Raishin bowed slightly, and turned to walk out of the door.

As dusk fell, the sounds of applause filled the air.

Raishin grew flustered, which was something out of character. He was used to being looked down on, but being admired was something he wasn’t. In fact, he would have preferred if he was on the receiving end of a scolding.

While deliberating on how he should handle this situation, the clapping suddenly stopped, and the sea of people parted.

Not even glancing at the cowering students, a beautiful girl with blonde hair and a dragon atop her hat— Charl was, quite rudely, making her way towards him.

In contrast to the students in formal wear, she was wearing her normal uniform.

Yaya went on high alert, sticking close to Raishin.

Charl turned her chest away, and looked down upon him.

“I can’t believe the Night Party has sunk this low. For someone like you to be a Gauntlet, the world must be coming to an end.”

She had spiteful words for him. After finishing her sentence though, she began to act suspiciously, her face turning red and her gaze wandering here and there. After a moment of hesitation, she abruptly thrust out her right hand.

There was a small box wrapped with a ribbon on her palm.

“... What’s this?”

“Are you an idiot? Obviously it’s a thank-you gift. As far as things go, no, I mean looking at the chain of events, there was the part where you did help me.



Therefore, from an objective point of view, giving you something like this is only common courtesy...”

Taking the box, he undid the ribbon.

Opening it, he removed the silver pendant that was inside.

“A protective amulet... I don’t see any spells, but there are runes inscribed on it.”

“It’s a defensive amulet that ups your defensive power. It goes well with your barbaric fighting style.”

“Take it, Raishin. Charl thought about what to give you so hard she almost got a fever.”

“Q-q-quiet, Sigmund! I’ll feed you breadcrumbs from tomorrow onwards!”

She turned red to the tips of her ears. Crossing her arms in a huff,

“There’s no ulterior motive behind this. It’s like that saying in Japan, ‘Send CO to your enemy.’”

“If Kenshin did that Shingen would have died, ok? That’s just a gas attack!”<sup>1</sup>

Having said that though, it wasn’t a bad gift. He felt that he should thank her.

Having done so, Charl turned her head away with an “Hmph!”

She then turned back to look at him with a severe glare.

“I hope you understand this, but when we meet in the Night Party—”

“We’ll be enemies, right?”

---

<sup>1</sup> salt in Japanese is shio, so Charl thinks it means CO, carbon monoxide. In Japan, there is a famous story about Uesugi Kenshin sending salt to his rival Takeda Shingen. For more details, please see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uesugi\\_Kenshin#Uesugi\\_and\\_Takeda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uesugi_Kenshin#Uesugi_and_Takeda)



“That’s right. Both Sigmund and I will be coming at you with all that we’ve got.”

“I might go easy on you though.”

“Wh...you...how can you say such an idiotic thing?”

“Yaya won’t hold back.”

Yaya cut in while smiling, but the smile didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Yaya won’t hold back.”

She said it twice. It must have been important to her.

But she was right. No one could afford to hold back, and the Night Party wasn’t a place where people who just roll over and die. Especially since the both of them had goals they needed to achieve at any costs.

Of course, that was the same for all other participants as well. All of them had dreams to achieve and reasons to fight.

With those at stake, there was no choice to go at it with all they had.

Raishin looked upwards, staring at the sky which was rapidly becoming pale.

With this, the curtain was about to rise on the Night Party.

## Afterword

Hello, Kaitou Reiji here.

This is my first book with Media Factory Bunko J. Here's to a long and successful run!

Now then, you, the person who saw the oriental gothloli on the cover and reach out for this book without thinking!

From the moment in time you were moved by this picture, you became a bro.  
~~What do you say we go out for a drink~~ Since we're on the same wavelength, if you're reading this in the aisle buy the book please <3

This story is about a so called [Magic Academy]. The setting of the series is the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where puppeteers have made their presence felt. The best puppeteers participate in a \*\*\*zero-sum\*\*\* game whereby they take part in night fights inside the academy... which is actually a reflection of the author's own interests.

Although the series takes place in the previous century, the characters speak modern language. It's a specific style of writing. It's called [Kaitou Reiji can only write modern Japanese], so please try to understand.

Also, the cover girl is a yandere... or rather, that was the plan, but by the time I noticed it she gave off more of a Yarare(injured) feel. People who like injured girls definitely check out this series!

The wonderful illustrations were done by the fantastic Ruroo-san.

Quite honestly, Ruroo-san's work is worth its weight in how much he's getting paid. Both Yaya and Charl are very cute. This author saw the SD art on the next page and he almost died from the moe overload.

During the busy moments, the one who calms me down with unerring precision when I'm recklessly overdoing it is Ruroo-san. Actually, that's not all...the truth is, Raishin being used by the military, Shouko's eyepatch glasses, and Charl's motif as a falconer, all these were Ruroo-san's ideas.

"That's brilliant! I'm taking that idea for myself!"

Every time I received a brilliant idea, I'd quickly insert it into the book.

This was my first time experiencing such a deep level of exchange between the illustrator and the author. Thanks to that though, I was able to go deeper into the roots of the series, bringing the world from just a simple flat setting to a gorgeous world filled with details. The reason why you're able to visualise the world so easily was all due to Ruroo-san's efforts, so I have to thank him from the bottom of my heart.

Also, this work doesn't just have visuals, it has a soundtrack to go along with it.

Somehow, I've managed to land an image CD for this work!

The composer is SPiCa's Toku P-san. To be quite frank, it's super cool. At this point in time of writing the afterword, the lyrics aren't quite finished yet, but the song is already stuck in my head on endless repeat. Can't wait for the finished version~

Finally, I have to say a very huge thank you to the person in charge, Shouji-san. I've made it!

At our first meeting,

"I want to do something that's very shounen manga-ish..." \*trembles with fear\*

"That's fine! I also like Weekly Shounen Jump!"

Having got the ok in the first reply, I started doing a little dance without thinking.

If that moment in time hadn't happened, this work would have never seen the light of day. Actually, not just "seen the light of day", this series would have never even been conceived!

There are also others for whom, without their support, I would have never started Unbreakable Machine Doll. I'm also excited to see how this story will unfold from here. However, whether or not the story will really unfold is something you, who are reading this afterword now, will have to wait to find out.

As long as you are supporting me, I will definitely give my 100% and then some. So—

See you again in Machine Doll 2!

October 2009

Kaitou Reiji

HELLO, THIS IS THE ILLUSTRATOR.  
THIS HAS BEEN UNBREAKABLE MACHINE DOLL.  
THE CURTAIN RISES ON KAITOU SENSEI'S WONDERFUL  
WORLD.  
SOMEHOW THAT MAKES ME FEEL SUPER COOL AS  
WELL.  
WHILE I'M FEELING ALL LIGHT AND FLUTTERY I'LL DO  
MY BEST, SO PLEASE TREAT ME FAVOURABLY.  
WITH THAT, I HOPE I CAN SEE YOU ALL AGAIN IN  
VOLUME 2.





*Project Leader and Translator – hayashi*

*Supervisor – Whitesora*

*Editor - Circa91*

*Typesetter - Victor Rama*

*Coloured Illustration Cleaner – Victor Hugo*